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COVER PHOTO: Tibetan man riding his horse during a horse racing festival in Sde dge County, Dkar mdzes Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province. Photo by Zla ba sgrol ma in the summer of 2014

ABOUT *ASIAN HIGHLANDS PERSPECTIVES*

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Asian Highlands Perspectives (AHP) is a trans-disciplinary journal focusing on the Tibetan Plateau and surrounding regions, including the Southeast Asian Massif, Himalayan Massif, the Extended Eastern Himalayas, the Mongolian Plateau, and other contiguous areas. The editors believe that cross-regional commonalities in history, culture, language, and socio-political context invite investigations of an interdisciplinary nature not served by current academic forums. *AHP* contributes to the regional research agendas of Sinologists, Tibetologists, Mongolists, and South and Southeast Asianists, while also forwarding theoretical discourse on grounded theory, interdisciplinary studies, and collaborative scholarship.

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YURTS IN BE SI CHUNG,
A PASTORAL COMMUNITY IN A MDO:
FORM, CONSTRUCTION, TYPES, AND RITUALS

Lha mo sgrol ma (Independent Scholar) and
Gerald Roche (Uppsala University)

ABSTRACT

This article focuses on yurts in Be si chung Village, in Henan Mongol Autonomous County (Rma lho [Huangnan] Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon [Qinghai] Province, China). Background is given on the focal community, yurt typology and construction are examined, and rituals traditionally held in the yurt of the Henan Chin wang 'prince' are discussed. Two maps and twenty-nine images are also provided.

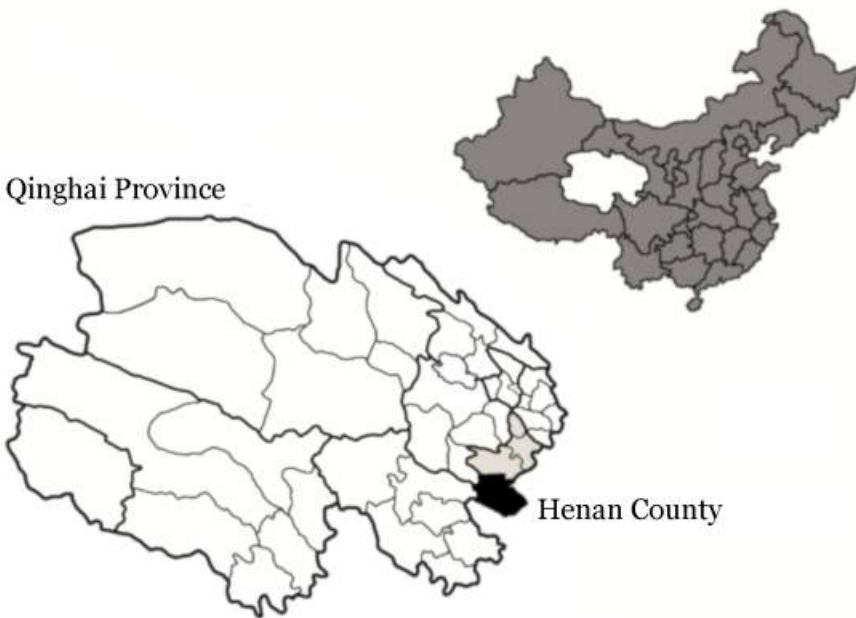
KEYWORDS

A mdo, Henan, Oirat, pastoralism, yurt

INTRODUCTION

Tshe dbang bstan 'dzin (1670-1735) was the first Chin wang 'Prince' of Henan, a pastoral territory on the upper reaches of the Yellow River, centered on what is today's Henan (Rma lho, Sog po) Mongol Autonomous County, in Rma lho (Huangnan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon (Qinghai) Province, China.

Map 1. Henan County.¹



He was a descendant of Gushri Khan, the Oirat (western Mongol)² leader who, at the behest of the fifth Dalai Lama's regent, established

¹ Based on a map available at [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Location_of_Henan_within_Qinghai_\(China\).png](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Location_of_Henan_within_Qinghai_(China).png), accessed 29 August 2013.

² The term Oirat refers to a Mongol ethnolinguistic subgroup, distinct from the Khalkha 'Eastern Mongols' (Halkovic 1985, Pegg 2001). In Tibetan contexts, Oirats and their descendants are typically referred to as Sog, and Khalkha and their descendants as Hor. The linguistic, cultural, and historical differences between Oirats and Khalkha are such that Miyawaki (1990) reports Khalkha referring to Oirats as *quri* 'aliens'.

Oirat hegemony across the northern Tibetan Plateau in the mid-seventeenth century. The history of this period has been dealt with elsewhere (Ahmad 1970, Perdue 2005, Uyungbilig Borjigidai 2002) as has the history of Henan (Diemberger 2007, Dkon mchog skyabs 2009, Gangs ljongs tshan rtsal rig gnas 'phel rgyas gling 2009, Kesang Dargay 2007, Lama Jabb 2009, Lce nag tshang hum chen 2007, Nietupski 2011, Rock 1956, Shinjilt 2007, Yangdon Dondhup 2002, Yeh 2003). For present purposes, it is important to note that the enfeoffment of Tshe dbang bstan 'dzin introduced elements of Oirat cultural influence to the grasslands of Henan, including the use of yurts.

This paper examines contemporary yurts in Henan, focusing on Be si chung Administrative Village, one of the few communities in Henan where a variety of the Oirat language was still spoken in 2013. We were unable to find any detailed literature on yurts in Henan. Yue (2009) briefly mentions yurts in Haixi Mongol and Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, and Dkon mchog skyabs (2009) provides the Oirat names for different parts of the yurt. Ekvall (1983:65) is one of few Western writers to mention the yurts of Henan:

The yurt is a much better bad-weather shelter than the black tent, but its cost and weight versus shelter area provided, and the longer time required for setting it up and taking it down, are unfavorable factors.

After providing background on Be si chung Village and its inhabitants, we provide details about yurts, including different types, New Year festivities in the Henan Prince's yurt, and yurt construction. We conclude with comments on the contemporary situation of yurts in Be si chung and in Henan more generally.

RESEARCH METHODS

In undertaking this research during 2012 and 2013, Lha mo sgrol ma, a native of Be si chung Village, interviewed ten people from different

villages in Khu sin Township, including two females and eight males aged between thirty-five and eighty-five. Most people were interviewed only once, while one consultant, Bso go, was interviewed three times. All interviews were conducted in A mdo Tibetan. Questions were written in Tibetan before each interview, and notes were taken in Tibetan during the interview. Follow-up phone calls were made to clarify information. Lha mo sgröl ma also visited the home of her relative, Bsam grub, in Khu sin Township to take photographs as he and his family members prepared yurt materials and pitched a yurt.³

The consultants and the information they provided are summarized below:

- Bso go (b. 1928) was the niece of Bstan 'dzin bkra shis, one of the Henan Prince's *me rin* 'ministers' (see below). She provided information about the Prince's New Year celebrations and various types of yurts.
- Brtson 'grus (b. 1934), an expert yurt maker from Tshos wan sos Village, explained that the Eight Auspicious Symbols⁴ are found on yurts, and also provided information about the Henan Prince.
- Ga rdo (b. 1942), a retiree from Tshos wan sos Village, was once the village's leader. He introduced the history of the Henan Prince and his ministers.
- Bsod nams tshe ring (b. 1970), from Rgya mkhar Village, is considered one of the most knowledgeable people in Henan regarding local history and culture and is much respected by locals. He was Khu sin Primary School headmaster beginning in 1993 and held this position for thirteen years. He was then the

³ Roche contributed to the article by assisting Lha mo sgröl ma with planning the research and structure of the paper, by eliciting detail and clarifying information, language editing, framing the materials with reference to Western literature, and writing certain sections.

⁴ The Eight Auspicious Symbols are common Tibetan decorative motifs used in both sacred and secular contexts. They consist of the lotus flower, victory banner, gold fish, conch shell, parasol, endless knot, vase, and dharma wheel.

leader of Khu sin Township for five years. He has now retired, due to poor health. He provided information about local education.

- Tshe ring don 'grub (b. 1960), Lha mo sgrol ma's father, learned yurt-making from Brtson 'grus. He provided yurt riddles, information on yurt materials, and described the making and pitching of yurts.
- 'Jigs med rdo rje (b. 1985), Lha mo sgrol ma's brother, provided diagrams.
- Rdo rje skyid (b. 1962), Lha mo sgrol ma's mother, provided examples of Oirat language from Be si chung.
- Grags pa rgya mtsho (b. 1979), from Yos rgan nyin Town, is a monk in La kha Monastery. He researches local customs and provided song lyrics sung during the Henan Prince's New Year rituals.

BE SI CHUNG VILLAGE

We focus on Be si chung Administrative Village, Khu sin Township, which is approximately seventy-two kilometers southeast of Yos rgan nyin (Youganning), the Henan County seat. Khu sin means 'navel' in the local Oirat dialect. According to villagers, the presence of a small navel-shaped hill near Khu sin Township Seat explains the township's name, which was given when the township was established in 1984. Earlier, it had been part of neighboring Mdo gsum Township.

Present-day Khu sin Township includes the traditional Be si che chung territory, which included Greater Be si (Be si che, now called Mo chu) and Lesser Be si (Be si chung, now called Khu sin da de).⁵ According to Dkon mchog skyabs (2009), 'Be si' comes from the Manchu language title 'Beize'/ 'Beile', which was a title given to the Henan Prince during the Qing Dynasty. Consultation with oral and written sources did not explain why these villages were named after this particular title.

⁵ Other communities in Khu sin Township, for example Rgya mkhar and Tshos wan tshos villages, were not traditional parts of Be si che chung.

According to Snying lcags (2011), an alternative name for the village is Ka rwa ro, which was the nickname of a famous local villager, formally known as Ban mig skya stong.⁶ This name is not in use among villagers; they call the village Khu sin be chung or Khu sin da de. We use the name Be si chung in this paper.

Map 2. A topographical map of Henan showing the location of Be si chung Village (circle, bottom right). High altitudes are lighter. Map by Gerald Roche.



Contemporary Be si chung Village consists of three brigades (First Brigade, Second Brigade, and Third Brigade) and has a total of forty households (242 residents, including 130 males and 112 females). We estimate that an average family has around six members. All Be si chung villagers are officially classified as Mongols. Traditionally, the village was organized into *ru skor* 'encampments', each of which had five to eight families that lived near each other for

⁶ This source does not provide further information on this individual. In 2013, Ka rwa ro refers to a lineage in Be si chung, presumably the descendants of the eponymous individual. Local oral sources suggest Ka rwa ro lived about five generations ago.

mutual aid and protection, but tended their own herds.⁷ Each encampment had a *mgo khrid* 'informal leader', who was usually an elder male.

All Be si chung villagers are pastoralists who herd yaks, sheep, and horses. The grassland has been divided on a per-person basis since the township was established in 1984. Each person has approximately ninety *mo'u* (about six hectares) of grassland. Traditionally, the Prince owned all the land, but communities managed territories allotted to them by the Prince. Frequent inter-communal conflicts (documented in Dkon mchog skyabs 2009) suggest that locals had a strong sense of proprietary over their land, though they did not own it.

Be si chung Village is located in a single valley, with the Har shul River running through the center from west to east. The north side of the valley is referred to as the *nyin sa* 'sunny side' whereas the southern side is the *srib sa* 'shady side'. Each family moves four times annually. The precise location of these seasonal pastures changes each year. Winter pastures are typically near the river, at the lowest altitude in the valley while summer pastures are located in the mountains north and south of the valley. Annual pastoral migration consists of movements between these two poles.

At the beginning of March, villagers move from their winter site to the spring pasture in the foothills around the valley. Villagers stay at the spring pasture until May, and then move to the summer pasture, higher in the mountains where they live from June until late August. In late August, herders move to their autumn pastures, located at approximately the same altitude as their spring pastures. Villagers then stay at the autumn pasture until late November, when they return to their winter pasture. Distances and travel time between camps varies for each family.

Families that are considered wealthy currently have 600 to 700 sheep, 130 to 150 yaks, and approximately forty horses, while

⁷ Dkon mchog skyabs (2009) lists The ji, Pa ba, Dge thub, Co yas, Man ju'i 'Jigs rgyam, Ra rdza, and Ba 'bas as the names of the encampments in Be si chung.

those considered poor have ninety to 110 sheep, twenty to forty yaks, and one or two horses. Villagers sell butter, wool, yak hair, cheese, milk, and one or two sheep or yaks a year to earn cash. They also earn cash by collecting and selling caterpillar fungus in spring for half a month. On average, a wealthy family's annual cash income is 15,000 to 20,000 RMB, while a poor family's is 4,000 to 5,000 RMB.

Most Be si chung villagers speak Tibetan and understand and speak a little Oirat (Western Mongol), which they call Sog skad (Birtalan 2003).⁸ We estimate that between forty and fifty people currently speak Oirat fluently in Be si chung, but finding exact numbers is challenging. The youngest fluent speaker is aged eighteen and the oldest is eighty-six. Most fluent speakers are over the age of fifty. All Oirat-speakers typically include Tibetan lexical items in their speech, as shown in the following brief example, in which Tibetan words are in bold:⁹

ཁོ་ཨ་ཁྲ་དར་ཁྲ་ཡིན་དམ།

Kho e hwan dar hwan **yin dus**¹⁰

When he was powerful...

Presently, Oirat has lost its role as a language of daily speech, and is mostly used as an argot among elders.

Be si chung villagers follow the Dge lugs Sect of Tibetan Buddhism and frequently visit Shing bza' Monastery,¹¹ which is fifty-five kilometers from the village, in the township seat. Villagers visit the monastery to worship and circumambulate on special occasions, such as the thirteenth to sixteenth days of the first lunar month, the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the fourth lunar month, and the first

⁸ Sog/ Sog po refers to Mongols and Mongolia, and Sog skad 'Sog language' refers generically to languages spoken by Mongolians.

⁹ The extent to which the use of Tibetan lexical items impeded communication with speakers of other Oirat dialects is unclear.

¹⁰ Here and elsewhere in the article, we render Oirat terms in Tibetan script. Although a script exists for Oirat (see footnote 13) it is not used in Henan.

¹¹ This monastery is also called Stag lung.

day of the sixth lunar month. The village *mgon khang* 'protector deity shrine' is located in the winter pasture. It is also referred to as *sku 'bum* '100,000 images' because the shrine contains numerous Buddha images made from red clay. Villagers circumambulate the *mgon khang* when they are free and are so inclined. Men may go inside to worship, but women may not.

Men go to mountain peaks to burn offerings to the local mountain deity, A myes sras mchog,¹² to beseech protection. Village males also make offerings at the *lab rtse* of Chab 'brag¹³ and Lha chen,¹⁴ to beseech these deities to protect people, pastures, and livestock. Each family has their own *srung ma* 'tutelary deity', who is typically Dpal ldan lha mo.

Every household has their own *mchod khang* 'shrine' in the winter house, which is separate from other rooms, and contains *thang ka* and pictures of *bla ma* and deities. Butter lamps are lit in front of these images every morning. Everyday, men burn *bsang* on the household roof and women burn *tsha gsur* 'a mixture of *rtsam pa*, butter, yogurt and milk' in the family courtyard.

Khu sin Township has a primary school with grades one to six. It was established in 1966 to serve both Khu sin and Mdo gsum townships, which were a single administrative unit at that time. In 1984, this unit was divided, creating Khu sin and Mdo gsum townships. Mdo gsum Township then built its own primary school. According to Bsod nams tshe ring, compulsory Oirat language classes were taught in Khu sin Primary School from 1985 to 1995 by teachers who were Oirat-speakers from Haixi Mongol and Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture. Students learned to speak Oirat and to write Mongol in the classical Mongolian script.¹⁵ There were approximately

¹² This 4,539 meter peak is in the mountains south of Be si chung (Snying lcags 2011). Men may offer *bsang* to this deity on any nearby peak.

¹³ This peak is in the mountains north of Be si chung and is 4,483 meters tall (Snying lcags 2011).

¹⁴ Snying lcags (2011) identifies Sras mochog and Lha chen as the same peak. However, these two peaks are on opposite ends of the valley's southern side. Sras mchog is at the east end and Lha chen is at the west end.

¹⁵ Although Oirat has its own script (see <http://www.omniglot.com/writing/kalmyk.htm>), Qinghai Oirat-speakers are classified by the government as

sixty students in the school at that time. However, during the Henan People's Congress of 1995, many argued that teaching Oirat was impractical in a Tibetan area. They contended that though students learned Oirat well, the language had limited usefulness. Therefore, it was decided that Tibetan would be used as the primary medium of educational instruction, supplemented by Chinese. Nonetheless, local elders sometimes teach spoken Oirat in their homes on weekends, to anyone who are interested.

Most Be si chung elders are illiterate except for a few who, at one time, had been monks or nuns. Some villagers attended illiteracy elimination classes in around 2001, and learned basic written Tibetan.

In 2013, the village had twenty-eight primary school students (twenty boys and eight girls), ten middle school students (four boys and six girls), seven high school students (four boys and three girls), four university students (two boys and two girls), and one postgraduate student (at Southwest Nationalities University, Chengdu City).

Eight locals who are university graduates work in the township or county governments. The youngest of these, Skal bzang don 'grub, who works in Yos rgan nyin, is from Be si chung. A graduate of Inner Mongolia Normal University, he was born in 1986.¹⁶

Mongol, and are taught the classical Mongol script that is used by Khalkha (eastern) Mongols (see Krueger 1975).

¹⁶ While a college student, Skal bzang don 'grub published a book titled *Na ri zhos bu* (Mongolian: *Sun Bird*). In 2005, the Hohhot TV Station broadcast a Mongolian language interview with him.

YURTS IN BE SI CHUNG

The following riddles describe yurts.¹⁷

Riddle 1.

¹ ཨ་ཚགས་ཡང་ཚགས་ཁ་ན།
² ཡང་ཚགས་བྲ་མའི་མགོ་ན།
³ དགྲིལ་འཁོར་མདའ་མདུང་བརྒྱ་ཡོད།
⁴ མདའ་ཡི་མདའ་སྟེང་རེ་ན།
⁵ བྱ་ག་པའི་ཨ་ལུང་བརྒྱ་ཡོད།
⁶ མདའ་ཐོག་དར་གྲིས་གཙ་ཡོད།
⁷ དར་ཐོག་མདུང་པའི་མནན་ཡོད།

- ¹ There is an infinite sieve.
² Atop the sieve,
³ Are hundreds of round arrow shafts.
⁴ Atop each arrow,
⁵ Are hundreds of bent hoops.
⁶ Ice covers the arrows.
⁷ Knots press on the ice.

Riddle 2.

¹ ཉག་ཁ་བརྒྱ་ན་དཔའ་བོ་བརྒྱ།
² དཔའ་བོ་བརྒྱ་ཡིས་ཞུ་གཅིག་གོ་ན།

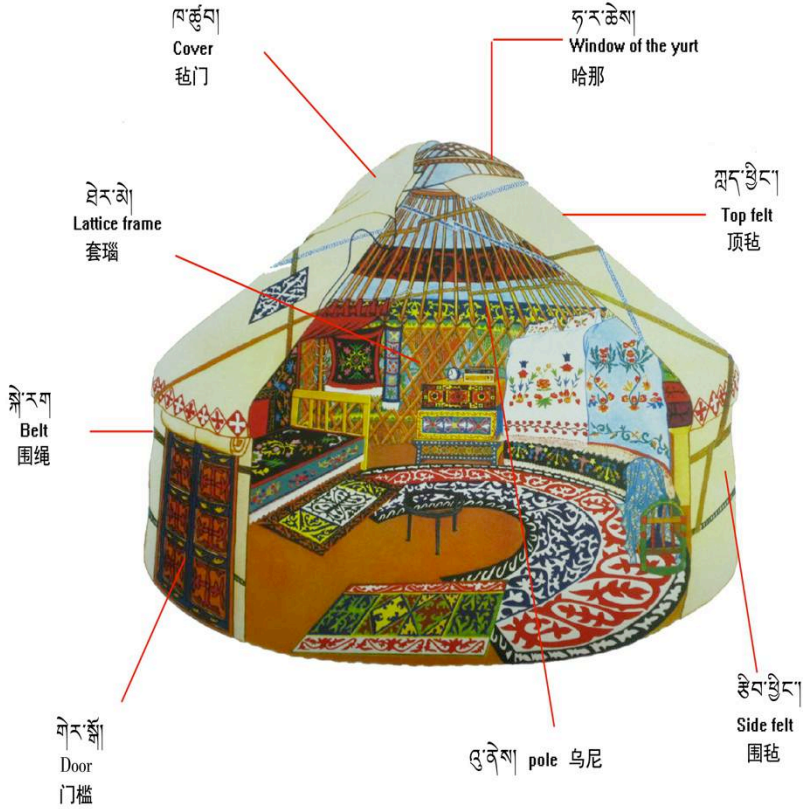
- ¹ There are one hundred heroes on the one hundred indentations.
² The one hundred heroes wear a single hat.

Local Tibetans call tents *sbra* or *gur* whereas Oirat-speakers say *ger*. According to villagers, *ger* has two meanings: 'home', for example, "*Ger du ya bas* 'Go home'," and 'house', for example, "*Ger*

¹⁷ These riddles were told by Tshe ring don 'grub.

du yer, 'Come into the house'." Names for yurt parts are outlined in the diagram below, and include both Oirat and Tibetan terms.

Figure 1. This picture is from an unpublished manuscript by 'Jigs med rdo rje and illustrates the names of different yurt parts.



Ger are considered to be symbols of auspiciousness. For example, Brtson 'grus contends that yurts embody the Eight Auspicious Symbols: the *ha ra ches* (skylight, below) symbolizes the dharma wheel.

Figure 2. The *ha ra ches*.



The *as di* 'gate/ door' symbolizes the two golden fish, the *ther shing* 'lattice panels' symbolize the eternal knot, the *klad phyng* 'top felt' symbolizes the victory banner, the round shape of the *ger* symbolizes the treasure vase, felt-covered lattice panels symbolize the precious parasol; the white color of the yurt symbolizes the white conch, and the yurt pitched on the earth symbolizes the lotus flower. Consequently, locals often refer to *ger* as *bkra shis rtags brgyad kyi gnas khyim* 'the home with the Eight Auspicious Symbols'.

Other features also make the *ger* a dwelling that is considered an auspicious place to live, for example, two tiger fangs at the back of the yurt prevent harm coming from behind the yurt.

Two tiger eyebrows on the front of the yurt are considered to prevent harm and disaster coming from the front of the yurt. Above the door the shape of a *tung tse* 'shoe-shaped ingot' is also believed to bring wealth.

Figure 3. The two 'tiger fangs' at the back of the yurt (see arrows, below) are thought to prevent harm from behind the yurt.



Figure 4. The two tiger eyebrows (see arrows, below) are thought to prevent harm and disaster coming from the front. Above the door, the diamond-shaped ingot symbolizes the family's wealth.



Sunlight shining through the skylight is used to tell the time. When sunlight reaches the top of the lattice frame, it is time to send the livestock to pasture. When light reaches the stove, it is midday, and therefore time to water the livestock. When sunshine leaves the yurt, it is time to drive livestock back home. A saying about this time-telling method goes:

གེར་ནང་ནི་ཐིག་ཕུག་རྩི་འོ་ཚད་ཡིན།
ger nang nyi thig phyug rdzi'i dus tshod yin
sunshine inside the yurt is the herdsmen's clock

Figure 5. The 'herdsmen's clock' – sunlight through the skylight.



A yurt's interior is arranged according to its inner (furthest from the door) and outer (closest to the door) sections, as well as its left and right side. Left and right are determined from the perspective of the innermost section of the yurt, facing towards the door – the opposite is the case for Tibetan tents.

Males place wooden boxes storing the family's valuables in the upper center of the yurt. Among them is an altar on top of a wooden box. On the right side, boys and men stack *sgyo* 'leather sacks' full of grain. Robes for men and boys are then stacked on these sacks.

Saddles are placed by the *sgyo*, near the door. Robes for girls and women are stacked on the saddles.

On the left side, women place a *thag* 'wooden cupboard' that has several shelves with bowls and cups. Next to the *thag* is a *zangs cha* 'cabinet' where copper pots, water buckets, and milk buckets are stored. The *thab ka* 'stove' is traditionally made of three clods of earth, and is in the center of the yurt. The family head sits between the *thab ka* and the shrine. Other males sit to the family head's right and females sit to his left, in descending order of age.

Yurt Types

Locals traditionally recognized three types of yurt: *mgon ger* 'shrine yurts', *dpon ger* 'leaders' yurts', and '*bangs ger* 'commoners' yurts'.

Mgon ger were used as communal shrine rooms. *Mgon* refers to the tutelary deity Mgon po 'Mahakala'. According to elders, the Be si chung *mgon ger* contained scripture books and a large statue of Mgon po. Elaborate food offerings were presented to Mgon po there on special days, such as during the New Year period. Women did not enter the *mgon ger*, but circumambulated it.

Dpon ger were larger than common yurts, and belonged to local leaders, including tribal leaders and the Henan Prince. Felt for such yurts was made from the best wool. Yak hair was used to adorn leaders' yurts with images from among the Eight Auspicious Symbols. The largest *dpon ger* belonged to the Prince. It was made with 120 *ther mgo*,¹⁸ which literally means 'pole head', which refers to the point where two poles crossed at the top of a lattice panel. A typical lattice panel consisted of ten *ther mgo* consequently, the Prince's yurt had twelve lattice panels.

According to Brtson 'grus, in addition to a large diameter, the Prince's yurt was also so tall that when it was pitched, someone stood on horseback to raise the skylight. The Prince's yurt was destroyed in

¹⁸ Gangs ljongs tshan rtсал rig gnas 'phel rgyas gling (2009) states that there were eighty *ther mgo*.

1958. However, the *dpon ger* of the Thor god tribal leader¹⁹ features 100 *ther mgo* and is now the largest yurt in Henan. It is kept by Phyag rdor²⁰ in his home, but can no longer be pitched because the skylight is broken.

Commoners' yurts were called '*bangs ger* and could not have more than sixty *ther mgo*. Infringement of this rule was punished by imprisonment in the Henan Prince's jail.

New Year Festivities in the Henan Prince's Yurt

A unique Henan festivity took place in the Henan Prince's yurt, which was traditionally pitched anew at New Year, as were all yurts. This rite required the assistance of special aides – the *me rin* and *sgo gcod*. *Sgo gcod* means 'door blocker', while *me rin* has no identifiable meaning. Those two people were always from Be si che chung, were chosen by the Prince, and served in this capacity until they died. Here, we focus on the *me rin* of the tenth Henan Prince, Bkra shis tshe ring, called Bstan 'dzin bkra shis, from Be si chung Village. According to Bso go, there were three *me rin* after Bstan 'dzin bkra shis until 1958: Sangs rgyas, Mgu grags, and Skal bzang rab rgyas. When Bstan 'dzin bkra shis was the *me rin*, the *sgo gcod* was Lo don.²¹ On the last day of the twelfth lunar month each year, the *me rin* and *sgo gcod* went to Urge,²² where the Henan Prince lived, and helped prepare for Lo sar.

The *me rin*, *sgo gcod*, and the Prince's ministers²³ arranged the seating according to social rank,²⁴ made food decorations, put out

¹⁹ Thor god corresponds to present-day Mdo gsum Township.

²⁰ The name of a male descendant of the Thor god tribal leader.

²¹ Lo don was a locally famous singer from Khu sin Township who died in about 2001 at, we were told, the age of 103.

²² This Mongolian term means 'palace' or 'royal residence'.

²³ According to Ga rdo, the Prince had 200 *blon po* 'ministers', who were also his soldiers. They stayed with the Prince only on such special days as New Year.

meat, bread, mare-milk liquor, and so on, in basins and plates, and then put these on tables. Gangs ljongs tshan rtsal rig gnas 'phel rgyas gling (2009:119), describes the prepared yurt as follows:

Three connected hearths were constructed in the yurt. Eighty pairs of storage sacks were on the right-hand side. Forty chests were in the center. Two types of cabinets were on the left. The shrine was at the head of the rows of seating. The king's²⁴ three thrones were in front of that. In front of the thrones were [the king's] gold, silver, and ivory seals and also the imperial decrees awarded to each successive Prince.

Next, everybody left the yurt while the *sgo gcod* stayed inside; the *me rin* stayed nearby, but not in the yurt. The *sgo gcod* could not leave until the next morning. Soon after sunrise on the first day of the New Year, the *me rin*, Prince, and all his family and ministers went to the yurt.

The door was locked from inside, and nobody, including the Prince, could enter. When the *me rin* knocked on the door with his *phu ring* 'long sleeves' three times, the *sgo gcod* said in Oirat:

ཆེ་ཁོན་པས།
che khen pas
Who are you?

The *me rin* responded:

པས་མེ་རིན་བཀྲ་ཤིས། དེན་ཆིན་ལྷ་མོ་ནི་མོ་ཞི་མེ་ལི་པེ་ནི། འེ་རུ་ཐེ་ལི།

pas me rin Bkra shis/ den Chin wang tho ne tho zhi me li pe
ni/ 'e du the li

²⁴ For example, the Prince's throne was placed in the middle of the yurt. The queen's seat was to the left of the Prince's throne. Ministers sat on both sides.

²⁵ The terms *rgyal po* 'king' and *chin wang* 'prince' are used interchangeably in this text.

I am *me rin* Bkra shis, and the Prince and his people are here too. Please open the door.

The *sgo gcod* replied loudly:

པས་སྒོ་གཙོང་ལྷང་ལེ་དུ་འོ།
pas sgo gcod wang 'e du 'ol

This is the *sgo gcod*, please come in.

The *sgo gcod* then unlocked the door, opened it, and welcomed everyone in. Everyone went inside and sat at their seats. The *me rin* brought a whole boiled sheep covered with a blue *kha btags*, and divided it among the guests. He had finished his duty and could sit.

The *sgo gcod* then held a bowl of mare's-milk liquor and sang three auspicious songs in Oirat. The Oirat lyrics have been forgotten, but their meaning has been recorded in Tibetan.

Song 1.²⁶

¹ དགྲུང་ཨ་སྒོན་ཡན་ལ་མཐོ་ནི་མེད།
² གན་ཡན་ཞིག་མཐོ་བའི་སྒོན་ལམ་འདེབས།
³ ས་བསང་དཀར་ཡན་ལ་རྒྱས་ནི་མེད།
⁴ གན་ཡན་ཞིག་རྒྱས་པའི་སྒོན་ལམ་འདེབས།
⁵ རྒྱ་གཙང་བོ་ཡན་ལ་བྱུག་ནི་མེད།
⁶ གན་ཡན་ཞིག་བྱུག་གི་སྒོན་ལམ་འདེབས།

¹ There is nothing higher than the sky.

² Pray to be higher than it!

³ There is nothing more prosperous than the earth.

⁴ Pray to be more prosperous than it!

²⁶ The following songs were provided by Grags pa rgya mtsho.

⁵ There is nothing more abundant than the river.

⁶ Pray to be more abundant than it!

Song 2.

¹ སེར་པོ་གསེར་གྱི་ཁྱི་ཐོག་ན།
² མགོ་གསེར་ལྷ་ཅན་གྱི་བླ་མ་སྟིང།
³ དཀར་པོ་དངུལ་གྱི་གདན་ཐོག་ན།
⁴ ཐོབ་གོ་ས་ཅན་གྱི་དཔོན་པོ་སྟིང།
⁵ གོམ་ལག་ཅན་གྱི་རྟ་ཐོག་ན།
⁶ ལྷམ་ཐུར་ཅན་གྱི་བུ་ཚ་སྟིང།

¹ On the golden yellow throne,

² The golden-hatted lama is happy!

³ On the silvery white mat,

⁴ The high-ranking leader is happy!

⁵ On the stylish well-paced horse,

⁶ The nimble-minded child is happy!

Song 3.

¹ སྟོད་གྱི་རི་པོ་སྤྲུག་པ་ཅན།
² རི་སྤྲུག་པ་ཅན་ལ་རི་དྭགས་འཁོར།
³ བར་གྱི་མཚོ་མོ་བླངས་པ་ཅན།
⁴ མཚོ་བླངས་པ་ཅན་ལ་ཉ་སྤུམ་འཁོར།
⁵ སྟོད་གྱི་དཔོན་པོ་བྱང་སེམས་ཅན།
⁶ དཔོན་བྱང་སེམས་ཅན་ལ་ལྷ་སྟེ་འཁོར།

¹ On the upper foggy mountain,

² Live wild animals.

³ In the middle vaporous lake,

⁴ Live fish and otters.

⁵ Under the lower benevolent leader,

⁶ Live his lovely subjects.

While singing, he danced around the interior of the yurt three times. None of those we consulted could describe this dance. When he finished this, the *sgo gcod*'s task was done and he could also sit. The Prince then said in Oirat:

པོ་གོ་དེ་གར་རན་ནེ་རི་ལ།

po go di ger ran ne ri li ya

The party begins. Everyone, enjoy!

Guests then drank, sang, danced, and played games. After some time, the *me rin* and *sgo gcod* returned home. They had no special position or role in community daily life, however, they were admired by villagers, because it was considered a privilege to be the *me rin* or *sgo gcod* and join the Prince's grand annual celebration.

Making and Pitching Yurts

We now describe the making of a yurt with eighty *ther mgo*.

Tools needed to make a yurt are: a '*ur cur ha* (used to straighten poles, see below), a '*bug* 'drill', *phying bu* 'felt', '*u nes* 'roof poles', a *sog le* 'saw'. Each is shown in the following photographs.

Villagers collect willow to make poles in early spring, before birds begin singing. From the twelfth to the second lunar months is generally the best time to collect willow, as expressed in the saying:²⁷

དཔྱིད་ཚེས་བྱ་ཤིང་།

dpyid tshigs bya shing

...which indicates that before birds sing, willow is strong, but afterwards, in spring, the willow becomes soft and supple, and is thus unsuited for making poles.

²⁷ Due to their abbreviated form, we have left this and the following saying untranslated. Instead, we provide brief interpretations.

Figure 6. Yurt-making tools. The piece of wood at the top is the *gcur shing*. It is part of the '*u cur ha*' and is used to straighten the yurt poles. The knife and stick below it on the right are also part of the '*ur cur ha*'. A saw is to the left. Other tools are drills.



Willow is collected in The bo Forest (in The bo Township, Mdzod dge County, Si khron [Sichuan] Province), because the best willow grows there. Only men collect willow. In the past, four to five yaks were taken to transport willow branches. Before 1985, collectors paid twenty kilograms of *zhag*²⁸ for 200 willow branches, but then began paying forty RMB. It currently costs 1,000 RMB for 200 poles. Each willow pole is about 2.5 meters long, and is transported in bundles of fifty.

The poles are stored in a dark place for one year, as reflected in the saying:

ཐེར་ཤིང་གཉེར་ས་མི་ནག
ther shing gnyer sa mi nag

...which implies that poles stored in a dark place become more durable. After one year, the poles are soaked in an artificial pool of water for forty-eight hours.

²⁸ *Zhag* is grease from meat that coagulates on top of the water meat is boiled in.

Figure 7. The willow branches are soaked in water to make them supple.



Sheep dung is then smoldered. The wet willow branches are put in the smoldering dung for fifteen minutes.

Figure 8. The wet willow branches are put in smoldering sheep dung.



After being removed from the fire, each willow pole is put in the mouth of the *'ur cur ha* to straighten it. One eighty-*ther mgo* yurt needed 256 poles.

Figure 9. The *'u cur ha* is used to straighten yurt poles.



Figure 10. A bent willow pole is straightened in the mouth of the *'u cur ha*.



Figure 11. Whittling a pole.



Next, poles are whittled to an even size, and red earth is used to color 255 of them. One is left white, and is considered a symbol of men. This white pole is used on the male side of the yurt. After being painted, the poles are dried in the sun. The dried poles are then measured to determine where to make the holes for the lattice joints and are sawn to an even length.

Figure 12. Measuring the poles to determine where holes will be drilled.



Figure 13. Sawing the poles to standard size.



A drill is used to make the holes where the poles will be joined to form a lattice. A *rgyun bu* 'leather cord' is threaded through the holes to create a sturdy *ther shing* 'lattice panel'.

Figure 14. This '*bug*' 'drill' is used to drill holes in the poles.



Figure 15. Two men operate the drill that makes holes in the poles.



Ger phying 'yurt felt' is made from sheep wool. Sheep are sheared from the fifteenth day of the fifth lunar month until the fifteenth day of the sixth lunar month. Neighbors gather and help each other shear. Men use shears to cut the wool. Women divide the wool into good and bad quality according to color. Whiter wool is considered higher quality. After that, wool is bundled for ease of transport.

Villagers then make felt. One piece of felt typically requires twenty kilograms of wool. The size is determined according to the size of the lattice panel. Firstly, villagers choose a flat place near a river, put a *ma phying*²⁹ on the grass, and then put wool on the *ma phying*. A clump of wool is placed in the middle, spread out to form a thin layer, and then the process is repeated. Next, the layered wool is rolled in the *ma phying* from bottom to top (using the forearms), and then from side to side, using a rope.

Six people kneel on the grass in two lines around the felt and roll the tied felt. While rolling, they count in Oirat, as follows:

²⁹ *Ma phying* refers to an old piece of felt used to make new felt. A family borrowed a *ma phying* if they lacked one.

ནི་གེ	<i>ni ge</i>	1
ཧོ་ཡོར	<i>ho yor</i>	2
ཡུ་རིབ	<i>wu rib</i>	3
ཏེ་རིབ	<i>te rib</i>	4
ཐ་བུ	<i>tha bu</i>	5
ཅི་ར་ལྷ	<i>tsir wa</i>	6
ཏོ་ལོ	<i>to lo</i>	7
ནེ་མི	<i>ne mi</i>	8
ཡེ་སུ	<i>ye su</i>	9
འ་རེས	<i>'a res</i>	10
ཧོ་རི	<i>ho ri</i>	20
ལོ་ཅི	<i>wo chi</i>	30
ཏེ་ཅུ	<i>te chu</i>	40
ཐ་བུ	<i>tha bu</i>	50
ཅི་རི	<i>ci ri</i>	60
ཏ་ལི	<i>ta li</i>	70
ན་ཡི	<i>na yi</i>	80
ཡེ་རི	<i>ye ri</i>	90
ཙོས	<i>tsos</i>	100

Each person counts four numbers in rotation until the number 1,000. The first person counts one to four, the second person counts from five to eight, and so on. After they roll the felt 1,000 times, it is firm and can be untied. The felt is then spread out, and left in the sunshine for fifteen to twenty minutes. The new felt is then rolled without the *ma phyig*, counting as before. This time, they roll it while counting to ten thousand, which takes approximately five hours.

Thirdly, after they finish rolling the felt ten thousand times, it is untied, put in a river for approximately fifteen minutes to clean, removed from the river, and spread out on grass in the sun until it is completely dry.

There are several types of felt for yurts including *klad phyng* 'top felt' (for the roof), *rtsib phyng* 'side felt' (to cover the walls), and *kha tshub* 'skylight cover'. However, regardless of the type or size, the process of making felt is the same. Felt is always white.

Having prepared all these materials, the yurt can then be pitched. The site where a family pitches their yurt is decided by lottery in Be si chung. Before moving pasture, the village leader summons each household head to join the lottery. He writes place names on pieces of paper, rolls each paper into a ball to ensure the text is not visible, and then each family head chooses one. Afterwards, each family uses several big stones to mark out the location for their yurt at their allotted site. There is no certain good or bad place for pitching a yurt, so long as it is within the village territory. Generally, however, people prefer a place near a river, which makes it convenient to fetch water. After pitching, a channel is dug around the yurt to prevent water from flowing into the tent. Since yurts generally face downhill, the channel directs the water from behind the tent, around the sides to the front of the tent, where two channels by the door funnel the water away from either side.

Yurts typically face south but, when a new yurt is pitched for the first time, it must face east, though locals are unable to explain why. After one week, or at most twenty days, the new yurt is rotated to face south.

Two to three people are required to pitch a yurt. One person first erects one section of lattice frame on what will be the right side. Then the other person ties together the joints of the eight lattice frames one by one.

Figure 16. The man on the left uses a leather cord to tie the lattice pane. The person on the right puts a lattice panel in place.



Figure 17. Setting up the lattice panels. The man (left) ties two panels, and the woman (right) will join the panels.



Lattice panels are set up in a clockwise direction, starting from the door, on the male side of the yurt.

Figure 18. The door is joined to the last lattice panel, completing the frame.



The skylight is typically made of *gsom shing* 'pinewood', and is purchased from Han carpenters in the county town. No locals in living memory have constructed skylights. The skylight is purchased without holes for the roof poles, which are dug out with a knife. Traditionally, the pinewood was wrapped with leather to protect it, but now it may also be protected with rubber (see images).

The yurt roof is pitched next. '*U nes* 'roof poles' are used to join the skylight and the lattice panels. Two roof poles are used to raise the skylight in the middle of the interior of the yurt. Roof poles are then inserted into the skylight holes by those outside the yurt. After inserting around forty roof poles, the skylight is stable.

Figure 19. Preparing to raise the skylight in the center of the yurt frame.



Figure 20. Raising the skylight.



Figure 21. Binding the lattice panels together.



Figure 22. The roof poles are tied to the lattice panels with the left hand.



Figure 23. The yurt roof poles are inserted into the skylight in no set order.



Figure 24. The pitched yurt frame.



After inserting eighty roof poles, the side felt and then the top felt are put over the frame. The side felt is bound with *ske rags* 'belts' made of yak hair. Finally, the *kha tshub* is put over the skylight.

Figure 25. Tying a rope to secure the side felt. Side felt is generally called *rtsib phying*, but the three pieces of felt required to complete the walls are divided into two types. Two pieces immediately adjacent to the door on either side are *rtsib phying*. A third piece at the back is *phugs phying*. Six ropes tie the three pieces of *rtsib phying* into place.



Figure 26. Placing the top felt. The top felt for this yurt consisted of two pieces. Each piece is slightly larger than half the roof, so the two overlapping pieces ensure the roof is water-tight. The first piece (below) is placed on the front of the roof, and is secured with two ropes. The second, upper piece is secured with three ropes.



Figure 27. A 'belt' is tied clockwise around the yurt.



CONCLUSION: YURTS IN PRESENT-DAY BE SI CHUNG AND HENAN
COUNTY

Bso go stated that all families in Be si chung lived year-round in felt yurts during her childhood in the early twentieth century. In approximately 1930, her father went to the market at Bla brang Monastery and purchased a cloth tent – the first in the village. From then on, her family lived in the cloth tent from spring to autumn, and in a felt yurt in winter. Cloth tents were easier to transport and pitch. Increasingly, villagers bought cloth tents from Bla brang. Living in felt yurts year-round became less common. Despite the upheavals of the ensuing decades, locals continued to live in cloth tents and felt yurts.

In 1984, when the government subdivided the collectively owned land, adobe houses began to be built in winter pastures. People dwelt in such houses during winter, while cloth tents or felt yurts were lived in during other seasons.

In 1988, Tshe ring don 'grub purchased Be si chung's first cloth yurt from a store in Henan County Town. The design was impressive – such yurts combined traditional aesthetics with ease of transport and pitching. A traditional wood and felt yurt took two hours to pitch while a cloth yurt typically required less than an hour. Although cloth yurts were more expensive than felt ones, they were purchased and used after Tshe ring don 'grub bought the first one.

Starting in around 1992, villagers began voluntarily relocating to Khu sin Township Town, where they lived in brick houses. Elders, especially, moved to care for their grandchildren while they attended school and their parents remained in the pasture. Use of yurts began to dramatically decline at this time.

In 2008, the government began building houses in the county town and offered them for free to any locals who wished to relocate there. Subsequently, many people moved from Be si chung Village to the county town. Typically, families sent children and elders to the county town, while adults stayed in the pasture to tend livestock. Housing projects were established for each township.

Figure 28. A modern cloth yurt. Photograph by 'Jigs med rdo rje.



Resettlement has fractured community structure. Housing is allocated based on township rather than village and, though separate housing projects have been established for Mdo gsum and Khu sin, residents of both townships currently live in both housing projects.

In 2011, the government increased the terms of resettlement by offering cash inducements to anyone who resettled in the county town housing projects. The cash offered was based on the amount of land a household had. As before, households typically responded by sending elders and children to the county town while continuing to herd in the village pastures.

Between 1992 and 2011, felt yurts disappeared from Be si chung. Simultaneously, the construction of 'Mongolesque'³⁰ buildings in Henan began, some of which resemble yurts. For example, the Henan Hotel, built in 2002, was the first 'yurt building' in Henan.

³⁰ The term 'Mongolesque' is employed in a way similar to 'Arabesque', which designates features in both music and architecture that were intended to evoke, rather than represent, Arabic, and more broadly Oriental culture.

Figure 29. The Henan Hotel, built in 2002, was scheduled for demolition when this picture was taken in 2013.³¹



In 2009, the stage for the triennial Nadam Festival was built in the shape of a half-yurt. Family homes, many of them in the resettlement projects, now have yurt-inspired features, such as domed roofs and curved bay windows. Most 'yurt houses' are white and blue, which locals consider symbolically Mongol colors. At the same time, miniature felt yurts have become popular throughout Henan. Women use them as jewelry boxes, and they are also filled with candy and displayed as decorations put up during the Tibetan New Year. Young women from Henan, in particular, are proud to dangle miniature felt yurts from their key-rings, purses, and mobile phones. While working on this article in July 2013, Henan residents were preparing to welcome Bla ma 'Jam dbyang zhad pa from Bla brang Monastery, who was scheduled to visit all the county's townships and monasteries. One of the most important gifts to be presented to him was a felt yurt, prepared in the traditional manner, by the people of Mdo gsum Township, indicating the continuing significance of yurts to the people of Henan.

³¹ For more images of Mongolesque features in Henan's architecture, see <http://www.flickr.com/photos/geraldroche/sets/72157635270168148/>.

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³² International Institute for Tibetan and Buddhist Studies.

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NON-ENGLISH TERMS

'bangs ger འབངས་གེར།

'bug འབུག།

'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa འཇམ་དབྱངས་བཞད་པ།

'Jigs med rdo rje འཇིགས་མེད་རྡོ་རྗེ།

'u cur ha འུ་ཅུར་ཧ།

'u nes འུ་ནེས།

A

A mdo ཨ་མདོ།

A myes lha chen ཨ་མྱེས་ལྷ་ཆེན།

A myes sras mchog ཨ་མྱེས་སྲས་མཆོག།

as di ཨས་དི།

B

Ba 'bas བ་འབས།

Ban mig skya stong བན་མིག་སྐྱ་སྟོང་།

Be si che བེ་སི་ཆེ།

Be si che chung བེ་སི་ཆེ་ཆུང་།

Be si chung བེ་སི་ཆུང་།

bkra shis rtags brgyad kyi gnas khyim བརྒྱ་ཤིས་རྟགས་བརྒྱད་ཀྱི་གན་ཁྱིམ།

Bla brang བླ་བྲང་།

Brtson 'grus བརྟས་རྩ་འབྲས།

Bsam grub བསམ་གྲུབ།

bsang བསང་།

Bso go བསོ་གོ།

Bsod nams tshe ring བསོད་ནམས་ཆེ་རིང་།

Bstan 'dzin bkra shis བསྟན་འཛིན་བརྒྱ་ཤིས།

C

Chin wang ཆིན་ལང་།

Co yas ཙོ་ཡས་།

D

Dge lugs དགེ་ལུགས་པ།

Dge thub དགེ་ཐུབ།

Dkon mchog skyabs དཀོན་མཆོག་སྐྱབས།

dpon ger དཔོན་གེར།

G

Ga rdo ག་རོ།

ger གེར།

ger phying གེར་ཕྱིང་།

ger shing གེར་ཤིང་།

Grags pa rgya mtsho གྲགས་པ་རྒྱ་མཚོ།

gsom shing གསོམ་ཤིང་།

gur གུར།

H

Har shul ཧར་ཤུལ། River

ha ra ches ཧ་ར་ཆེས།

Haixi 海西 Mongol and Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture

Henan 河南 Mongol Autonomous County

Hohhot (Huhehaote 呼和浩特)

Huangnan 黄南 Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture

K

Ka rwa ro ཀ་རུ་རོ།

kha tshub ཁ་ཚུབ།

Khu sin ཁུ་སིན། Township

klad phying ཀླད་ཕྱིང་།

L

La kha ལ་ཁ། Monastery
lab rtse ལ་རུ་ཙེ།
Lha mo sgrol ma ལྷ་མོ་སྒྲོལ་མ།
Lo don ལོ་དོན།

M

Ma ju'i 'jigs rgyan མ་རྒུའི་འཇིགས་རྒྱན།
ma phyng མ་ཕྱིང་།
mchod khang མཚོད་ཁང་།
Mdo gsum མདོ་གསུམ།
Mdzod dge མཛོད་དགེ།
me rin མེ་རིན།
mgo khrid མགོ་ཁྲིད།
mgon ger མགོན་གེར།
mgon khang མགོན་ཁང་།
Mgon po མགོན་པོ།
Mgu grags མགུ་གྲགས།
Mo chu མོ་ཚུ།
mo'u མོ་འུ།
Mtsho sngon མཚོ་སྔོན། Province

N

Na ri zhos bu ན་རི་ཞོས་བུ།
nyin sa ཉིན་ས།

P

Pa ba པ་བ།
phu ring པུ་རིང་།
Phyag rdor ཕྱག་རྡོར།
phyng bu ཕྱིང་བུ།
phyugs phyng ཕུགས་ཕྱིང་།

Q

Qinghai 青海 Province

R

Ra rdza ར་རྩ།

Rdo rje skyid རོ་རྗེ་སྐྱིད།

Rgya mkhar རྒྱ་མཁར།

rgyun bu རྒྱལ་བུ།

Rma lho ར་ལྷོ།

rtsam pa རུ་མ་པ།

ru skor རུ་སྐོར།

S

Sangs rgyas སངས་རྒྱས།

sbra སྐྱལ།

sgo gcod སྐོ་གཙོང།

sgyo སྐྱོ།

Shing bza' ཤིང་བཟལ།

Sichuan 四川 Province

Si khron སི་ཁྲོན།

Skal bzang don 'grub སྐལ་བཟང་དོན་འགྲུབ།

Skal bzang rab rgyas སྐལ་བཟང་རབ་རྒྱས།

ske rags སྐེ་རགས།

sku 'bum སྐུ་འབུམ།

Snying lcags སྟིང་ལུགས།

sog le སོག་ལེ།

Sog po སོག་པོ།

Sog skad སོག་སྐད།

srib sa སྐབ་ས།

Stag lung སྟག་ལུང་།

T

thag ཐག
thab ka ཐབ་ཀ
thang ka ཐང་ཀ
The bo ཐེ་བོ།
The ji ཐེ་ཇི།
ther kha ཐེར་ཀམ།
ther me ཐེར་མེ།
ther mgo ཐེར་མགོ།
ther shing ཐེར་ཤིང་།
Thor god dpon po ཐོར་གོང་དཔོན་པོ།
tsha gsur ཐ་གསུར།
Tshe dbang bstan 'dzin ཐེ་དབང་བསྟན་འཛིན།
Tshe ring don 'grub ཐེ་རིང་དོན་འགྲུབ།
Tshos wan sos ཐོས་མན་སོས།
tung tse ཏུང་ཙེ།

U

Urge ཡུརྟེ།

Y

Yos rgan nyin ཡོས་རྒྱན་ཉིན།
Youganning 优干宁

Z

zangs cha ཟངས་ཆ།
zhag ཞག
Zi ling ཟི་ལིང་།

TIBETAN MARMOT HUNTING

Sangs rgyas bkra shis (Independent Scholar) with
CK Stuart (Shaanxi Normal University)

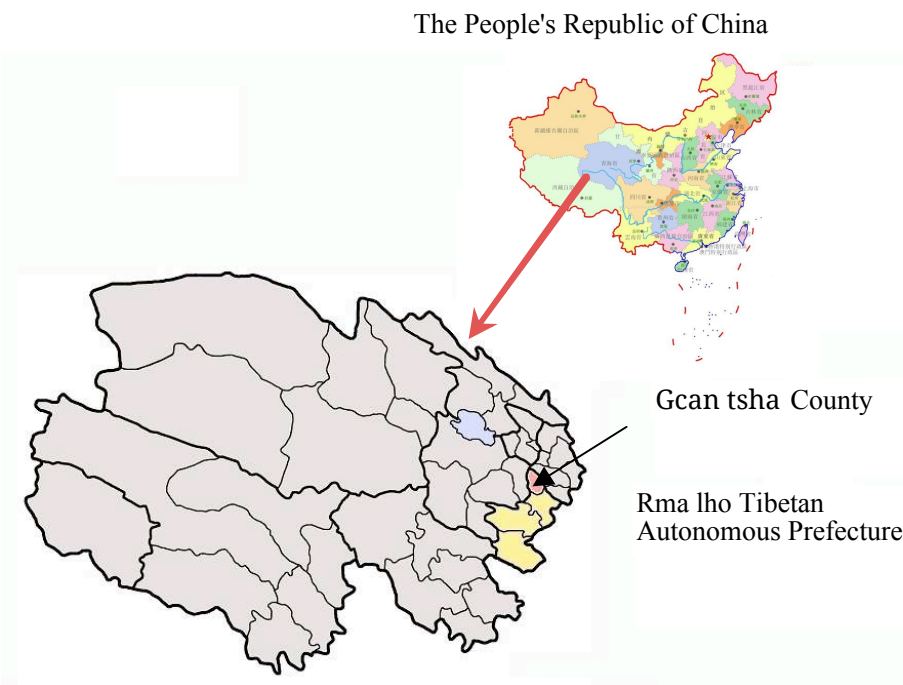
ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the hunting, cooking, and eating of marmots among pastoralists in Gcan tsha thang (Jianzhatan) Township, Gcan tsha (Jianzha) County, Mtsho sngon (Qinghai) Province, PR China. Folklore positing a connection between humans and marmots is discussed and Sangs rgyas bkra shis provides a story about local marmot hunters and gives accounts from his paternal grandmother (Pa lo skyid, b. 1941) about marmot hunting in 1958. A conclusion suggests directions for future research. Accounts of marmot hunting and marmot product use from Yul shul (Yushu) and Dkar mdzes (Ganzi) Tibetan autonomous prefectures, a map of Mtsho sngon, and six photographs provide further detail.

KEYWORDS

A mdo, Gcan tsha (Jianzha) County, hunting, marmots

MAP OF MTSO SNGON (QINGHAI) PROVINCE¹



¹China map: <https://tinyurl.com/yclut9ul>. Mtsho sngon map: <http://tinyurl.com/o6azwco>.

¹ཇག་པས་མི་ཟ་ཟས་གསུམ་དེ།
²སྟོང་གྱི་ཤུ་བོའི་གཞུག་རྟོག་གཅིག་།
³གཉན་པོ་འབྱི་བའི་ཅི་ལམ་གཉིས་།
⁴ནངས་སྤྱི་མོའི་ར་ཤ་འབྲུག་པ་གསུམ་།

¹jag pas mi za zas gsum de
²stod kyi shwa bo'i gzhug rdog gcig
³gnyan po 'phyi ba'i tsi lam gnyis
⁴nangs snga mo'i ra sha 'khyag pa gsum

¹There are three foods bandits won't eat:
²The first is highland buck testes,
³The second is kindred marmots' bare armpits,
⁴The third is early morning cold goat meat.²

INTRODUCTION³

"Have you ever eaten marmot?" If Tibetans I⁴ know are asked this question, the answer is generally negative. However, upon further inquiry, the answer often develops to include accounts of having eaten marmot during times of critical food shortage and reference is often made to 'other' Tibetans 'over there' who do eat marmot. As Childs notes "...we should never assume that statements reflecting acceptable standards of behavior are an infallible guide to how people think and act under concrete circumstances" (2005:2). With regards to marmot as a food, it is of note that the excerpt from a wedding song above (from Khri ka [Guide] County) does not rule out eating marmot – just the marmot armpit.

In this paper, we provide information about the habitat and biology of the Himalayan Marmot; a description of Gcan tsha thang

² Tshe dbang rdo rje et al. (2010:128-129).

³ We thank George Schaller, Richard Harris, Andrew Smith, Gabriela Samcewicz, Timothy Thurston, Gerald Roche, and Rin chen rdo rje for helpful comments.

⁴ Unless otherwise indicated, 'I' and other first person references indicate Sangs rgyas bkra shis.

(Jianzhatan) Township; my family's experiences with herding and livestock; cooking and eating marmots, including related taboos; an account of marmot hunting given by my maternal grandmother (Pa lo skyid, b. 1941); and a story I wrote about hunting, cooking, and eating marmots based largely on personal experiences. Additional Tibetan areas are referenced in order to provide further information.

Nikol'skii and Ulak (2006:50-51), citing various sources, describe the Himalayan Marmot (*Marmota himalayana*, Hodgson [1841]) as a high-mountain species differing from other marmots in that it is only found at 3,000 meters and above, in mountains including the Kunlun, Arkatag, Altyn Tagh, and Nanshan mountain ranges, and on the Tibetan Plateau,⁵ in Sikkim, and in Bhutan. Smith and Yan (2008:191) provide additional information:

Himalayan Marmots live in small or large colonies, depending on local resources, and feed on grasses by preference, although they also consume roots, leaves of herbaceous plants, and seeds. They excavate unusually deep burrows, which are shared by colony members during hibernation.⁶ Females give birth toward the end of hibernation, with litter size reported to be 2-11...born from April to July. Gestation is one month, and young are generally weaned at 15 days of age. Young normally remain with the family, and females become reproductively active only in their second spring.

In terms of dangers to the environment, neither marmots nor pikas (*Ochotona curzoniae*) are seen by locals as a threat to the grassland. There are few pikas and locals do not feel that they damage the grassland. In summer, we often see and hear marmots, and we also know that they eat grass, however, they are not seen as a problem. This belief is not universally accepted in ecological literature, for example, it runs contrary to the viewpoint espoused by Long et al. (2009:189):

⁵ One of China's natural plague reservoirs (Benedict 1996).

⁶ See Chos bstan rgyal (2014:153) for an account of an agreement between Marmot and Rabbit that explains marmots' hibernation period.

The Himalayan marmot...increased rapidly in the areas where rangeland condition declined, which, in turn, led to degraded lands and, in severe cases, to secondary bare land.

In an interview with a representative of the Kansas City Public Library, Kenneth Armitage, an expert on the yellow-bellied marmot (*Marmota flaviventris*) (Armitage 2014), discussed how climate change was affecting marmots and concluded that warmer weather was largely responsible for an increase in the marmot population.⁷ However, this increase in population, despite warmer temperatures (Zhu et al. 2013) has not been reported on the Tibetan Plateau. For example, Harris and Loggers (2004) reported that the number of marmots in Yeniugou, Haixi Mongolian and Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture Qinghai Province appeared unchanged since the 1990s. In general, however, little is known about climate change and its effects on *Marmota himalayana*.

GCAN TSHA THANG TOWNSHIP

Gcan tsha thang (Jianzhatan) Township, Gcan tsha (Jianzha) County, Rma lho (Huangnan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon (Qinghai) Province, PR China consists of seven *sde ba* 'pastoral communities': G.yon ru (Xiayangzhi), Sprel nag⁸ (Shinaihai), Gle gzhug (Laiyu), Rkang mo (Gangmao), Lo ba (Luowa), Ka rgya dang bo (Gajiayi), and Ka rgya gnyis pa (Gajiaer).⁹

Gcan tsha thang Township has a land area of 642 square kilometers. The population of 4,000 is ninety-nine percent Tibetan,

⁷ Interview: KU's Marmot Man, Dr. Kenneth Armitage, <http://www.kclibrary.org/blog/kc-unbound/interview-ku-s-marmot-man-dr-kenneth-armitage>, accessed 18 April 2014.

⁸ For an introduction to this community in the context of Tibetan speeches, see Thurston (2012).

⁹ Data for elevation, population, and pastoral communities are from <http://wapbaike.baidu.com/view/928121.htm> and <http://wapbaike.baidu.com/view/1620614.htm> (accessed 3 March 2014).

according to official statistics.¹⁰ The township offices are located in Jianzhatan, the township seat. In 2014 this small settlement consisted of one main road; several small shops that sold clothes, snacks, and candy; the township government offices; and Bca 'sdod (Jisu) Primary School that had three grades, about 200 students (mostly from G.yon ru Pastoral Community), and ten teachers. Nearly all the Tibetans in this township are herders.

MARMOTS: TERMS, PRODUCTS AND THEIR USE, AND HUNTING

Locals use *'phyi ba* as a general term for 'marmot'. Young marmots are called *ca lu*. In Lo ba Pastoral Community, only a few male residents occasionally (once or twice a year) eat older marmots, while local females never eat marmots. Marmot meat is always cooked and eaten outside the house. It is never brought inside the house. The times I saw marmots cooked were when I was herding on the mountains near where the marmots were killed, and also near some homes. The only explanation I know for why marmots are not cooked inside the home is that locals believe it will anger the family's *srung ma* 'guardian deity' and, in retaliation, people and livestock will become ill. Any knife used to cut up marmot meat is not brought inside the home for the same reason. I am unable to explain why it is taboo for females to eat marmot.

Marmot fat is considered an efficacious treatment for the sores on livestock feet and mouths, for example, when they exhibit symptoms of foot and mouth disease.¹¹ Some families put the fat in a container, close the container, and hang it from the ceiling of their sheep shed to keep it handy for the treatment of livestock disease.

Marmot skin is also used to treat human ailments. Strips of marmot skins are tied around a person's back (hair side against the

¹⁰ A small number of non-Tibetan teachers, township government workers, and so on constitute the remaining one percent.

¹¹ Animals may have this disease once every two or three years. Locals use no treatment other than marmot fat.

skin) to treat back pain. I have seen a few old people wear such skins.

What I have observed above is in partial agreement with Bkra shis rab brten¹² from 'Bri stod County, Yul shul Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon Province who, in consultation with local elders in 'Bri stod, supplied the following information:

Many people in the 'Bri stod (Zhiduo) area used to eat marmot, and a few people still do. During the times of starvation in the 1960s, people hunted marmots using hunting dogs and traps. Generally, people don't like to eat marmot because of its strong smell and because marmots have both upper and lower teeth, which some Tibetans believe make it a taboo food. Although the meat smells bad, certain people like the taste and eat marmot today, though they are no longer worried about having enough food to eat.

Most Tibetans in 'Bri stod don't eat marmots and they don't like those who do eat marmot to touch food containers or foods when they visit their homes. Brag dkar (Zhahe) Township residents are known for their marmot hunting.

Those who do eat marmots, usually cook marmots outside the house because of its strong smell and because some members of their family who don't eat marmot object to it being cooked inside. However, some families boil it inside their home. Because of the meat's strong and distinctive taste, only salt is used as a seasoning. Both women and men eat it.

Marmot fat is used to treat wounds in the belief it accelerates healing. Marmot skin is very helpful for arthritis, and pieces of skin are used to cover painful joints, and also to make shirts and trousers. Such clothes are worn with the hair side next to the skin, which is believed to lessen joint pain.

Grandmother (Pa lo skyid, b. 1941) told me that locals used to teach their hunting dogs, the same kind of dogs people keep today, to hunt marmots.¹³ Grandmother also provided the following account

¹² E-mail 14-16 April 2014.

¹³ For marmot-hunting dogs in Yul shul, see Bkra shis dpal 'bar (2011:295):

A group of low-status men traditionally hunted marmots. The belongings of these wandering men were carried by dogs. Such families also had dogs especially adept at hunting marmots, called 'marmot dogs'. These dogs were not considered special, because it is thought

about a government organized marmot hunt:

In the cold winter of 1958, the leaders forced us to make a marmot hunting team. I was part of that team. The earth was frozen and as hard as iron. We couldn't dig easily with metal shovels so we made a big fire atop a marmot den. The next morning, the earth was soft and we could easily dig. The earth was not frozen several meters under the surface. We dug a long tunnel and then we went into the hole one by one and pushed the soil out using our hands. When we reached the head of the hole, there was a large den that about nine people could sit in. There were also nine marmots leaning against the wall. Their hands were together as though they were meditating. They were very fat, just like marmots in autumn. There was grass in the den, just like the grass in summer. There was so much grass that it took two yaks to haul it back to where we were living.¹⁴ We took the marmots outside and they collapsed when the sun shone on them.

Later, the men killed the marmots and gave them to the officers in the community [who probably ate them].

Some Lha sa people¹⁵ use the term *sgom pa rgya ris* 'piebald meditator'.¹⁶ People say marmots meditate in winter and that is why they don't die, even though they stay in their dens all winter.

that almost any dog can hunt marmots. Furthermore, these dogs were considered ugly because they were mottled-the back of the neck was spotted and the tail was white. Such dogs were thought to be slow and clumsy. Currently, local people disparage certain dogs by calling them 'marmot dogs'.

¹⁴ In a survey of local people's attitudes toward wildlife conservation in Hemis National Park, Ladakh, researchers reported locals found "that marmots tended to consume much needed livestock forage in the form of non-cultivated grasses and forbs" (Jackson et al. 2003:8). This accords with Pa lo skyid's observation of the relatively large quantity of forage the marmots had collected.

¹⁵ 'Lha sa people' is a term used by locals to refer to people from Central Tibet.

¹⁶ *Sgom pa rgya ris* 'piebald/ dappled meditator'. *Rgya ris* refers, locally, to a color, not only for a marmot's face, but more generally to describe the color of yaks, i.e., a yak that has a black body but a head that is of a different, mixed color, e.g., black, yellow, and white hair all together. The term is also used to describe a sheep that is all white except for a face of the colors just described. The same notion applies to a marmot's face.

Many years ago, when people were walking to Lha sa from A mdo, Lha sa people asked A mdo people if it was true that people ate marmots in A mdo. If the A mdo people said yes, the Lha sa people were shocked and immediately prayed to Buddha, hoping that they wouldn't be reborn in such a place.

Grandmother also told me the following about one of her relatives who is about her age:

In that difficult time, he was very good at catching marmots. When he skinned and butchered marmots, hungry children would surround him and would try to grab and eat pieces of the raw marmot.

When I was a child, I heard elders scold young people if they saw them kill marmots. Father's brother (Rdo rje thar, b. 1977) said that he thought killing marmots was terrible. When I asked why, he said:

Marmots and people are relatives. They each took an oath that they would never hurt each other. To seal this oath, the marmots gave people a piece of their flesh and the people gave the marmots a piece of their flesh. That piece of flesh is the armpit. Today people are crazy and have broken this oath. It is a serious sin. Human beings are not to be trusted.¹⁷

He was distraught. Later, wondering if this was true, I asked Grandmother. She said it was true, although she added that she had never looked in a marmot's armpit.

A complementary report comes from travelers in Mgo log. While circumambulating the sacred mountain, A myes rma chen, their driver, Nanjit [Rnam rgyal] made the following comment:

...Tibetans do not eat the marmots because they share a special

¹⁷ This coincides with Tshe dbang rdo rje et al. (2010:128):

Local accounts tell that marmots and people are relatives because they long ago exchanged their armpits with each other. Proof of this is that people have hairy armpits and marmots do not.

connection with the animal. According to him [Nanjit/ Rnam rgyal], the marmot has no hair under its armpits. The reason is because it gave that part of its body to us, which is why we have hair under our armpits. And we, in turn, gave our hairless armpits to them. Therefore, we both share each other's body, which is why we should refrain from eating marmots lest we want to partake in some [sic] cannibalism.¹⁸

Notions of kinship between humans and marmots is one likely reason marmot hunters are generally denigrated. Old people scold young people if they see them killing marmots.

One autumn in about 2005, five Han Chinese men came to my home in a trailer pulled by a tractor and pitched two cloth tents. They killed, skinned, cooked, and ate marmots. They were particularly interested in the marmot skins. They also poisoned marmots. Some livestock ate the poison and died. Eventually, we made the marmot hunters leave.¹⁹

I heard that residents in one community in Khri ka (Guide) County kill few sheep. Instead, they hunt marmots for meat, and both men and women eat marmot meat. I do not know how true this is, however, my home area borders this village and, while herding, I have seen residents of that community trying to catch marmots.

There is variation in hunting, eating, and utilization of marmots and marmot products. For example, Dze lu (b. 1950) from Brag mda' (Zhang da) Village, Nyin mo (Yimu) Township, Brag 'go (Luhuo) County, Dkar mdzes (Ganzi) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province provided this account:

I hunted marmots when I was about twenty years old. There were stories that eating marmot and even seeing a marmot would prevent good luck, but people hunted them quite often, mostly for their skin. While people did cook marmot in their homes and

¹⁸ <http://www.chinanomads.com/a-half-kora-around-amnye-machen>, (accessed 7 March 2014). Nanjit = Rnam rgyal, a native of Mgo log Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon.

¹⁹ Soonam Doomtso (2011) offers a chapter on Chinese marmot hunters in her home area in Sichuan Province, the concern they created in the local community, and what was done to persuade the marmot hunters to leave.

both men and women ate it, the skin was what was prized. It was especially good for kidney pain²⁰ that a lot of local men seemed to suffer from. Marmot skin was also the best kind of bed covering. Nothing seemed to stain it, including baby pee.²¹

In 2003, when I was about twelve years old, while helping Grandmother herd sheep near some broken walls about a fifteen-minute walk from our home, I asked her, "Who lived here?"

She said, "I heard some families lived here but they then got '*phyi nad* 'marmot disease' [the plague]. Many people died from that disease, so they were afraid of living here and fled."

This resonates with Fang's (2009) report:

A deadly-infectious zoonotic disease caused by the *Bacillus yersini pestis*, plague is listed as the No. 1 Infectious Disease of Class A in the "Law of the People's Republic of China on the Prevention and Treatment of Infectious Diseases." Qinghai is one of the provinces that have suffered the most severe plagues in the country, as evidenced by the once-popular saying that "China will be free from plagues if Qinghai is safe from it" before the 1980's. The major host animal of *Bacillus yersini pestis* [sic] is the Himalayan marmot. ... statistics demonstrate that in 1949–1992 the number of pneumonic plague patients in Qinghai accounted for 57.37% of the total number of China, which was much higher than that in other provinces.²²

These concerns about the plague infecting humans through contact with marmots are also borne out by what I have observed. If a

²⁰ This corresponds with what Sun et al. (1989:85) reported, i.e., that the marmot's "flesh is used as a traditional medicine for renal disease."

²¹ We thank Lhun 'grub for this account, received in May 2014.

²² This quote is from <http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/cspub/dcp/2009/00000001/00000001/art00007>, accessed 8 April 2014. We did not have access to other versions of this article. See also <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/872095.shtml> (accessed 6 August 2014), for an account of a resident of Yumen City, Gansu Province who died:

of bubonic plague. ... The 38-year-old victim was said to have approached a dead marmot, a small furry animal which lives on grasslands and is related to the squirrel. The victim allegedly chopped it up to feed his dog but developed a fever the same day.

marmot, for example, has bald spots, moves slowly, and has dull hair, it is considered to be sick and is avoided. Dead marmots are also avoided. Locals believe that close contact with a sick or dead marmot might also make them sick, which is supported by a study done by Li et al. (2005) involving serum samples collected in Huangyuan County, Xining City, Mtsho sngon Province from marmot hunters and their family members. The results of this study suggest that marmot hunting brings significant risk in terms of plague infection that may enter a human host through small skin breaks, infected fleas, and through respiration. The authors note that because sick marmots are easier for hunters to catch, they pose a greater risk for plague infection.

In my pastoral community of around 4,000, there might be about ten people who hunt and eat marmots. No one in my family hunts marmots. However, if a neighbor or friend is cooking a marmot, they feel obligated to offer the meat to whoever might be nearby. In such a case, my father or brother might eat a piece of marmot, also out of a sense of obligation.

Marmot skins are rarely sold by locals.

With the above as background, I provide a short, fictional account of marmot hunting, based on my experiences herding my family's livestock.

MARMOT HUNTING

Early one morning, Tshe 'bum yag and Mgon po, both in their mid-twenties, drove their flocks of sheep and herds of yaks to the mountains as usual. After leaving their livestock in a valley with plenty of grass and flowers, with shovels on their shoulders they climbed a mountain. The bright sun shone in the cloudless blue sky. Countless sunrays reflected off billions of dewdrops on the grass. Tshe 'bum yag and Mgon po reached the mountain top, collected some stones, put them in their robe pouch, and looked around. Everything was quiet.

Tshe 'bum yag cupped his hands and whispered into Mgon po's left ear, "Let's look in that valley."

The two men crept slowly and carefully, not making a

sound, into a valley, looked around, and saw three fat marmots grazing joyfully about fifteen meters away. The three marmots repeatedly put their ears up, and listened quietly again and again. However, they didn't register the arrival of the two hunters and continued grazing.

The two hunters were very familiar with marmot behavior and didn't move. First, they looked around for the marmot family's den. A moment later, Mgon po gestured to Tshe 'bum yag, pointing to a hole in the ground with his forefinger. Tshe 'bum yag looked in that direction and saw an opening near the three marmots. The hunters guessed it was the marmots' burrow. At this time, the biggest marmot was about thirty meters from the hole. The two hunters estimated that they could reach the hole before the marmots.

"*Ke! Ke! Ke!*" the two hunters suddenly shouted, threw stones at the marmots, and ran toward the hole.

The three frightened marmots tried to escape into their burrow. Two reached their burrow, despite being struck by stones, and disappeared inside. Tshe 'bum yag stood at the hole blocking the big marmot. He forcefully threw a stone at it, striking it in the belly. Realizing it was impossible to reach its burrow the marmot ran, looking for another hole.

The two hunters ran after the marmot, shouted, threw stones, and tried to catch it. The marmot ran down into the valley and disappeared into a burrow just as Tshe 'bum yag had nearly grabbed its back legs. Somewhat disappointed, they examined the hole, which was surrounded by bushes.

Holes that marmots frequently use are dug into soft earth that does not contain large stones. When marmots dig tunnels and encounter rocks, they may abandon the tunnel. Furthermore, bushes are generally very low around the opening to a marmot den because the marmots eat them. The soil inside the hole was hard and white, which told the two hunters it was an abandoned den that was probably shallow.

They took off their robes and began digging. The summer earth was soft and easy to dig. Mgon po concentrated on looking for the marmot inside the hole.

After Tshe 'bum yag had dug about two meters, Mgon po shouted, "I can see it!"

The marmot was furiously digging. The hole was very narrow and the marmot couldn't turn back. Mgon po pulled its tail, which broke off. The big marmot was very strong and Mgon po couldn't pull it out. Then Tshe 'bum yag took his sash, tied it

tightly around the marmot's legs, and dragged it out of the hole. Mgon po hit its head with the shovel. The marmot staggered here and there making loud sounds of suffering. Finally, Tshe 'bum yag took the shovel and hit the marmot's head really hard. Its head shook as blood poured from its nose, and its legs jerked spasmodically. It died a moment later.

The two hunters carried the big marmot up the valley. "We are lucky today. We killed this one easily," they exulted while chatting on the way.

Their sheep and yaks were scattered everywhere when Tshe 'bum yag and Mgon po reached the mountain top. Other flocks of sheep and herds of yaks were there, too.

"Ke! A! Ha! Ha!" shouted Mgon po and holding one of the marmot's legs, swung the dead marmot above his head when he saw some fellow herdsmen.

They gathered at the top of a small hill where they could watch everybody's livestock. Tshe 'bum yag, being the oldest, directed his fellows to collect stones and dried yak dung.

"Please find about fifteen round stones. This marmot is really big," Tshe 'bum yag said to two fellows, who went to find the stones.

Tshe 'bum yag thrust a long-handled shovel into the earth. Then he walked over to a yak and pulled out some hair from its tail as it grazed. He returned to the shovel. The blade was firmly in the ground. He made a long tight string from the yak hair, tied the string around the marmot's two long front teeth, and then tied the string around the upper part of the shovel handle. The marmot's body now hung down, the head firmly tied to the shovel handle. He took his dagger from his belt, cut around the marmot's throat, skillfully tore flesh away from the bones inside the marmot's body, and cut and broke the bones at the joints. He discarded the intestines. He then cut away the lower part of the front legs and also cut off the head and discarded it.

Mgon po and others made a fire from the collected yak dung and put the round stones into the fire. The stones were soon red hot. Tshe 'bum yag pulled open the opening of the marmot carcass. Mgon po held a marmot leg that had been cut off, pulled a leg tendon to make the claw grip a hot stone tightly, and, in this way, put stones into the meat-filled skin. They also added cut-up bones, salt, liquor, and *ri sgog* 'wild garlic' they had collected in the valley. The liquor and onions removed the marmot meat's unpleasant odor. Tshe 'bum yag tied the skin tightly at the neck with yak hair string.

The broth soon began boiling inside the skin. A moment

later, they brought some black soil dug from the earth by a *byi long* 'mole', put it on the skin, and pulled out the hair from the skin with their fingers. The black soil made removing the hair easy.

The marmot skin soon became as yellow as fried chicken. The herders salivated when they saw this. Some minutes later, they collected fresh grass and put the cooked marmot on top of the grass. They untied the string and poured broth into the bowls they had brought from home. They were careful that the very hot broth did not burn their mouths. Tshe 'bum yag cut the marmot meat into pieces, removed the stones, and then they started eating. While the livestock enjoyed the grass and flowers, the herders enjoyed the delicious marmot meat. This merry summer day was pleasant for both livestock and herdsman.

After eating, they divided the leftovers equally. Each would take his portion home to share with his family members. A local saying goes:

*gal te 'phyi sha zos ba'i rjes nas pho ba na tshe bcos
thabs dka' la/de zhi ba'i sman ni chu 'khyag yin*

If your stomach aches after you eat marmot, it is difficult to cure. Cold water is the best medicine.

Following this injunction, they all went into a valley, found a clean stream, and drank as much clean, cold water as they could from the head of the stream that flowed out from the earth.

In the afternoon, as the sun's weakening rays shone in the distant horizon, Tshe 'bum yag and others gathered their livestock, counted them to make sure they were all there, and then drove them home while singing loudly.

CONCLUSION

When I was a child, my parents told me and my two brothers, as well as any other children who happened to be near, "Don't kill baby rabbits. If you do, their mother will come and hurt your mother." They also scolded us if they saw us killing insects, saying, "If you kill insects, their mother will come and go through your mother's ear and

your mother will die." When we found sparrow nests with eggs, we often inspected the eggs to see if they had hatched. Our parents then warned, "If you often look at the nests, hawks will know where the nest is and kill the sparrow family."

Although my father slaughters some of our livestock every year,²³ it is to provide us with meat, a main part of our diet as herdsmen. The prohibition against killing marmots is particularly strong, given the belief that marmots are related to humans.

The photographs below, which were taken on 13 August 2014 about a ten minute walk from my family's tent in our autumn pasture, relate to this. A Han man from Khri ka County, who had come to the local area before to buy sheep and yaks, and to sell flour and red bricks, had brought three metal traps and put them in different marmot dens at around noon. He checked the traps in the afternoon, found three marmots had been caught, and killed them with a knife. Knowing that locals would scold him if they saw him with dead marmots, he put the marmot carcasses in a bag, put the bag in a marmot den, and covered this with a stone to ensure dogs would not find it. Then he put the traps in new dens.

That night, the hunter stayed in a tent with a local family that treated him well and offered him mutton and noodles. The next morning, some locals saw him killing marmots that were in his traps. They chanted for the marmots, scolded the hunter, and told him to take the dead animals with him and never hunt marmots again. Father phoned me when he saw this because I had told him that I needed some marmot pictures. When I got there by motorcycle, the hunter was leaving.

"How did you learn to trap marmots and what will you do with them?" I asked the hunter.

He said, "I used to herd yaks on the Laji Mountains²⁴ about ten years ago when my family lived there. I often hunted with my hunting dog. It is easy to catch marmots if you have a hunting dog. I

²³ In 2013, it was about five sheep. In some years Father might also slaughter a yak.

²⁴ Located about fifty kilometers southeast of the center of Xining City.

also hunted foxes, because Tibetans liked to wear fox skin hats at that time. My family members like to eat marmot. I'll take them home and eat them with my family."

As the fictional hunting account above and the photographs that follow indicate, some local Tibetans do hunt, kill, and eat marmots, but it is not something they boast about.

Future research on marmots might address such questions as:

- What are local attitudes toward marmots and how do such attitudes influence interactions between humans and marmots?
- Why do certain Tibetan villages hunt marmots while others do not?
- What is the attitude toward marmot hunting on the part of Mongols who live in Tibetan contexts?
- What is the relationship between marmot hunting and traditional concepts of purity and pollution?
- What is the market for marmot products and how does this impact marmot populations?

PHOTOGRAPHS

Figure 1. Marmot den near my home (January 2014). Local elders scold people they see digging into marmot dens because they think killing marmots is wrong and that such digging damages the grassland.



Figure 2. Marmot den in my family's fenced pasture (August 2014).



Figure 3. Tibetans from a neighboring community in Khri ka County dug into this marmot den (January 2014).



Figure 4. Marmot trapped and killed by a Han man from Khri ka County in the autumn pasture (August 2013, Rab brtan rgyal).



Figure 5. Marmots trapped and killed by a Han man from Khri ka County in the autumn pasture (August 2013, Rab brtan rgyal).



Figure 6. Marmot fat in a Pepsi bottle in my neighbor's sheep enclosure.



Figure 7. Himalayan marmots in Ladakh (Webster 2013).²⁵



²⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Himalayan_Marmots.jpg, accessed 26 August 2014. This is an edited version of the file that is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported license.

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NON-ENGLISH TERMS

'Bri stod འབྲི་སྟོད། (Zhiduo 治多)

A mdo ཨ་མདོ།

A myes rma chen ཨ་མྱེ་མ་ཆེན།

Bca' sdod བཅའ་སྟོད། (Jisu 寄宿)

Bkra shis dpal 'bar བརྒ་ཤིས་དཔལ་འབར།

Bkra shis rab brtan བརྒ་ཤིས་རབ་བརྟན།

Brag 'go བླག་འགོ། (Luhuo 炉霍) County

Brag dkar བླག་དཀར། (Zhahe 扎河)

Brag mda' བླག་མདུག། (Zhangda 章达)

byi long བྱི་ལོང།

ca lu ཅ་ལུ།

Chos bstan rgyal ཆོས་བསྟན་རྒྱལ།

Dkar mdzes དཀར་མཛེས། (Ganzi 甘孜)

Dze lu ཇེ་ལུ།

G.yon ru གཡོན་རུ། (Xiayangzhi 辖羊直)

Gansu 甘肃 Province

Gcan tsha thang གཅན་ཅང་ཐང། (Jianzhatan 尖扎滩) Township

Gcan tsha གཅན་ཅཱ། (Jianzha 尖扎) County

Gle gzhus གླེ་གཞུག། (Laiyu 来玉)

gal te 'phyi sha zos ba'i rjes nas pho ba na tshe bcos thabs dka' la/de

zhi ba'i sman ni chu 'khyag yin གཤམ་ཏེ་བྱི་ཤེ་ཤེས་བའི་རྒྱུ་ནས་ཕོ་བ་ན་ཆོ་

བཅོས་ཐབས་དཀར་ལ། དེ་ཞི་བའི་སྒྲུ་ནི་ཆུ་འབྱུག་ཡིན།

Haxi 海西 Mongolian and Tibetan Prefecture

Huangyuan 湟源 County

Ka rgya dang bo ཀ་རྒྱ་དང་བོ། (Gajiayi 尕加一)

Ka rgya knyis pa ཀ་རྒྱ་གཉིས་པ། (Gajiaer 尕加二)

Khri ka ཁྲི་ཀ། (Guide 贵德)

Laji 拉脊 Mountains

Lha sa ལ་ས་

Lhun 'grub ལུན་གུབ་

Lo ba ལོ་བ། (Luowa) 洛哇

Mgo log མགོ་ལོག་

Mgon po མགོན་པོ།

Mtsho sngon མཚོ་སྒྲོན། (Qinghai 青海) Province

Nyin mo ཉིན་མོ། (Yimu 宜木) Township

Pa lo skyid པ་ལོ་སྐྱིད།

pastoral community (*mu wei hui* 牧委会)

'phyi ba འཕྱི་བ།

'phyi nad འཕྱི་ནད།

Rab brtan rgyal རབ་བརྟན་རྒྱལ།

Rdo rje thar རོ་རྒྱེ་ཐར།

Re bltos bca' sdod རེ་བཟོས་བཅའ་སྡོད། (Fuheji xiao 福和寄校)

Rin chen rdo rje རིན་ཆེན་རོ་རྒྱེ།

ri sgog རི་སྒོག།

Rkang mo རྒྱང་མོ། (Gangmao 刚毛)

Rma lho རྩ་ལྷོ། (Huangnan 黄南) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture

Rnam rgyal རྣམ་རྒྱལ།

Sangs rgyas bkra shis སངས་རྒྱས་བཀྲ་ཤིས།

sde ba སྡེ་བ། pastoral community, village

sgom pa rgya ris སྒོམ་པ་རྒྱ་རིས།

Shaanxi Normal University, Shaanxi shi fan daxue 陕西师范大学

Sichuan 四川 Province

Sonam Doomtso (Bsod nams dung mtsho བསོད་ནམས་དུང་མཚོ།)

Sprel nag སྤེལ་ནག། (Shinaihai 石乃亥)

Srung ma སྤུང་མ།

Tshe 'bum yag ཚེ་བུམ་ཡག།

Tshe dbang rdo rje ཚེ་དབང་རྡོ་རྗེ།

Yeniugou 野牛沟

Yul shul ཡུལ་ཤུལ། (Yushu 玉树)

Yumen 玉门 City

Xining 西宁 City

A COMPLEX IDENTITY:
RED COLOR-CODING IN ALAI'S *RED POPPIES*

Alexandra Draggeim (The Ohio State University)

ABSTRACT

Alai's Red Poppies presents a complex depiction of Tibetan identity that is at odds with the romanticized portrayal of the Tibetan minority in Chinese government media as well as with the standard historical positioning of Old Tibet as feudal and primitive. The color red is an ongoing theme that recurs throughout the novel, from the original introduction of the red poppies, to their spread throughout the area surrounding the Maichi chiefdom and, finally, to the chiefdom's downfall, offering insight not only into the complexity of Sino-Tibetan relations, but also into tension between Tibetan self-perception and popular image. Using a color frequently associated with Red China to highlight diverse cultural themes, Alai's work provides us a valuable window into marginal Tibetan realms outside of Central Tibet.

KEYWORDS

Alai, metaphor, poppies, red, *Red Poppies*, Tibet

INTRODUCTION¹

Published first in 1998 in Chinese and then in English in 2002, *Red Poppies*,² originally *Chen'ai luoding* 'The Dust Settles', is a highly acclaimed work of modern Chinese fiction by the Tibetan author Alai. The novel's multi-layered plot centers on the fate of the last Maichi chieftain, a local overlord in the Sino-Tibetan corridor, and is told from the point of view of the overlord's 'idiot' son. *Red Poppies* presents the reader with a variety of complex themes, from the hybrid identity of the half-Tibetan author as projected onto the narrator, to the interaction between Tibetans and Han Chinese. At the same time, the color red, whether as part of the description of Tibetan material culture or as the dominant characteristic of the powerful poppies, is a unifying thematic strand that runs from the opening chapters to the bloody end of the Maichi dynasty.

Central to the novel is the red poppy itself

its giant blossoms rapidly reddening the gray area between the white and black lands ... not only a hallucinogen and an aphrodisiac but also a biological metaphor and color code for a new form of Chinese colonization ... Red Chinese now prescribe their red utopia as a more effective opiate than red poppies (Choy 2008:229).

¹ I would like to thank those without whose aid this paper would not have been possible, especially Mark Bender, Timothy Thurston, and two anonymous reviewers who provided invaluable comments.

² I base my analysis on the English translation of *Red Poppies* by Howard Goldblatt and Sylvia Li-chun Lin (2002). Although the translation certainly differs from the original, the translators nevertheless preserve numerous color-related metaphors. For this reason, all quotations of the novel itself are taken directly from the translated version. Here is a translated passage followed by the original as an illustration of the translators' fidelity to Alai's metaphorical language: "People said she would give birth to a crazy baby, since the mad, raging love between her and the chieftain had nearly turned them both to ashes" 人们都说, 那样疯狂的一段感情, 把大人都差点烧成了灰, 生下来会是一个疯子吧 (2). Both passages refer to ashes; the Chinese states, literally "[it] almost burned them to ashes." Another example, from the same section, is "flames of madness must have shown in my eyes" 我的眼睛里肯定燃烧着疯狂的火苗 (2). In the latter example, "mad tongues of flame" in the Chinese is rendered as "flames" in the translation.

The arrival of the Red Chinese in the Maichi region leads to a clearer differentiation not only among, but also within ethnic groups. Previously, the narrator had viewed the Tibetans as a group of people with some common cultural characteristics and common interests, yet the appearance of the Han creates a more competitive relationship among different tribes. Divisions among Han Chinese crystallize as well. After the arrival of the 'colored Chinese' in Chapter Forty, politically-based distinctions become even more prominent among the Red Chinese and the White Chinese, even though both political subgroups belong to the same ethnicity.

The color red links the narrator's personal identity with Tibetan identity as a whole. Red is the mad passion that gave rise to the idiot-narrator; red is the color of Han poppies and Communist ideology. Moreover, the progression of red-related symbolism highlights the complex nature of the Maichi decline. On the one hand, the destruction is internal, and the narrator eventually dies at the hand of a fellow Tibetan. On the other hand, external destruction in the form of opium and Western-style weapons is introduced by the Han Chinese. *Red Poppies* takes place in the decade leading up to the 1949 revolution, yet its Jiarong Tibetan³ leaders are unaware that opium had been a source of difficulties and humiliation for the Qing Dynasty more than one hundred years earlier.⁴ The Tibetan lifestyle, largely unchanged by the Opium Wars and the fall of the Qing Dynasty, is suddenly shaken by foreign influences. The Han, having

³ Jiarong Tibetans reside in northern Sichuan Province and are considered to be part of the Tibetan nationality according to the official PRC classification. They regard themselves as descendants of the "eighteen tribes of Jinchuan" and now refer to themselves as Tibetan (G. yu lha 2012:27). Some scholars believe that Jiarong Tibetans are descendants of Tibetans and Qiang people dating back to when Tibetans moved eastward in the Tang Dynasty (see De 2004). Now generally considered a Tibetan subgroup, the Jiarong are at the same time somewhat Sinified.

⁴ See Schell and Delury (2013) for an in-depth account of how Chinese intellectuals struggled to balance China's political tradition with the need to adapt modern Western principles to become a world power. China's primary goal was to abolish the opium trade, which was draining the national supply of silver and sickening the population.

lost their own battle against opium and foreign weapons, bring them to Tibet, drawing upon the foreign commodities as a source of power, transforming from the colonized to colonizers.

I will examine how the color red and red-related metaphors, in the sense of Lakoff and Johnson (1980), represent the complex and fluid Jiarong Tibetan identity. The treatment of identity in the novel is interesting in that the story is told through the eyes of a Jiarong youth, presenting a unique emic perspective. Such a perspective is rarely seen in fictional as well as in academic works by Chinese scholars,⁵ even those who are ethnically Tibetan, as they predominantly focus on linguistic or historical characteristics.⁶ The manner in which red-related metaphors are constructed is reminiscent of the techniques used in magical realism and contributes to the modernist qualities of the work (Schiaffini-Vedani 2008). This modernist feel is reinforced by Howard Goldblatt and Sylvia Li-chun Lin's translation, which, through a variety of translation choices, creates the feeling of a work suspended in time and space. Although I predominantly approach this work through examples from the English translation, most metaphors remain unchanged by translation.

The connection between red metaphors and a diversity of cultural themes undermines the now-common association in mainstream Chinese media of red with a unified New China,

⁵ Here, 'Chinese' refers to scholars who are citizens of the People's Republic of China and thus includes Chinese citizens who are ethnically Tibetan. In discussing Alai's work, it is important to specify that one is discussing Tibetans and Han Chinese, who comprise two distinct ethnic groups, rather than Tibetans and Chinese citizens. 'Tibetan' here refers to those who are ethnically Tibetan, rather than those residing in the Tibet Autonomous Region, as many ethnically Tibetan areas are located in the neighboring provinces of Qinghai and Sichuan. The various ways in which these terms can be used reflect conflicting political and cultural realities.

⁶ Li (1997), for example, examines relationships between Jiarong Tibetans and other ethnic groups and details the rule of the eighteen Jiarong chieftains, working closely with Chinese historical records. Other works, such as Qu (1990) and (Sun 2003), focus on analyzing the linguistic aspects of the Jiarong dialect. Jacques has also made a significant contribution to Jiarong language classification and research (2008).

consisting of a Han core and fifty-five harmonious minorities, including Tibetans: happy, willing, naïve subjects of the PRC.⁷ Outside of the post-1949 Chinese ethnic paradigm, which was largely based on Stalin's definitions of a nation,⁸ Alai appropriates red-related symbolic discourse for his own purposes: emphasizing and highlighting, not simplifying, diversity and historical complexity. Rather than emphasizing unity and clear ethnic distinctions, Alai writes about a borderland region with allegiances both to the Emperor and to Lhasa. It is neither the Shangri La idealized by some Westerners, nor the backward, primordial society in official discourse of the Chinese government.⁹ *Red Poppies* even brings into question our notion of Tibet, which does not appear to be as unified and monolithic in the novel as we may imagine.¹⁰

⁷ For instance, in the late 1980s, the Chinese government sponsored pictorials depicting Tibetans happily voting, or on the Great Wall with the caption "I love the Great Wall" (Gladney 1998:97).

⁸ Stalin (1952) defined a nation as a historically formed, stable community of people with a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up.

⁹ For an example of standard government policy, see the website of the Chinese Internet Information Center (www.china.org.cn). The first sentence on the page about feudal serfdom in Old Tibet states:

Before the Democratic Reform of 1959 Tibet had long been a society of feudal serfdom under the despotic religion-political rule of lamas and nobles, a society which was darker and more cruel than the European serfdom of the Middle Ages. (<http://www.china.org.cn/e-white/tibet/9-4.htm>)

¹⁰ Tuttle (2010:32) presents evidence of Tibetan communities that, while maintaining communication with each other, were distinct in terms of local culture and ethnic composition. He notes that these multilingual, multiethnic borderland communities had students who studied in Lhasa and occupied important religious posts, but also monks who served at the court in Beijing and taught in Inner Mongolia.

ALAI AND HYBRIDITY

The identity of the narrator, who was born to a Han mother and Tibetan father, is similar to that of the author. Alai was born in 1959 in Aba Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province to Tibetan and Hui¹¹ parents, but self-identifies as a Tibetan (Thurston 2007:1-2). Before becoming a professional writer, Alai worked as a teacher of Mandarin and is married to a Han woman, thus witnessing encounters between Han and Tibetan cultures on a daily basis. Influenced by two different societies, Alai is a 'culturally hybrid' author who chooses to write in Mandarin. Like the 'culturally hybrid' Yi writers described by Luo (2001), Alai narrates his Tibetan tale in a manner that makes it accessible to a larger Han audience. Luo notes that Mandarin and Han culture can facilitate the dissemination of local stories and experiences. Similarly, Alai feels more comfortable writing in Mandarin, in which he received his education, and views it as more suitable for writing modern fiction for several reasons, including his belief that Tibetan is "too tied to classical Tibetan" (Wang 2013:98). He is a cultural hybrid from a professional perspective as well, occupying the official post of Chairman, Sichuan Branch of the Chinese Writers' Association, but writes about personal, localized, and ecologically situated experiences of Sichuan Tibetans.

Like Alai, the narrator is born to parents of different ethnic and social backgrounds, his mother having come to the chieftom as a prostitute presented as a gift to the chieftain by a Chinese trader: "trapped between Tibetanness and Chineseness, nobility and lowliness, his ethnic and class status – two of the key components that constitute an identity – are problematic" (Choy 2008:230). In the morning, during the transition between sleep and reality, the 'idiot' narrator is often preoccupied with the questions, "Who am I? Where am I?" (Alai 2002:204-5). In fact, not only is the narrator displaying aspects of an ambiguous identity, but so are those around him, transforming from lover to maidservant, from executioner to

¹¹ The Hui, one of China's fifty-six officially recognized ethnic groups, are a predominantly Muslim people who live mostly in western China.

photographer, from priest to historian. These changes to new, often inherently modern roles sometimes take place suddenly in an otherwise realistic narration. For example, the monk Wangpo Yeshi loses his tongue as punishment for proselytizing Gelug doctrine¹² but is immediately deemed the new Maichi family historian (Alai 2002:168). They are atypical in a hierarchical society where professions such as that of the butcher are strictly hereditary. Perhaps the insertion of these fantastical changes underlines a general shift in Jiarong society and the Jiarong Tibetans' precarious position in time and space, between ancient times and modernity, Beijing and Lhasa.¹³

Of course, it is the narrator who proclaims himself to be an idiot and is viewed as such by his friends and family; thus, his voice cannot be assumed to represent other characters' perception of reality. Nevertheless, rather than constituting true madness, his 'insanity' imbues him with a certain wisdom,¹⁴ allowing him to raise important questions, and giving the narrator a degree of freedom in his decisions and interaction with others.

Alai's cultural hybridity is not uncommon among contemporary Chinese authors. His background is similar to that of

¹² The Dalai Lama is the most well-known representative of the Gelug Sect, founded by Tsong kha pa (1357-1419). It is also known as the 'Yellow Sect', because lamas who belong to this sect wear yellow hats (Ling 2004:72). The fact that the chieftain was resistant to Gelug doctrine preached by Wangpo Yeshi further emphasizes the Jiarong area's status as a borderland, culturally distant from both Lhasa and the east.

¹³ Jiarong Tibetans predominantly inhabit Aba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province. They are not the only ethnically Tibetan sub-group who live in a borderland region. The ethnically Tibetan villagers in Suopo Township, Danba County, Sichuan Province, for example, also perceive themselves as marginalized Tibetans and have appropriated this idea to emphasize their distinctiveness from other Tibetan groups, carving out a "new space for their survival, cultural expressions, identity construction, and political positioning" (Tenzin Jinba 2014:7).

¹⁴ Thurston (2007:43-69) points out that the fool is actually a traditional social pariah character type commonly used by Alai in his works. In *Red Poppies*, the narrator-fool is characterized by many surprising manifestations of wisdom.

Zhaxi Dawa, born in 1959 in a Tibetan area of western Sichuan to a Tibetan mother and Han father. While self-identifying as a Tibetan, Alai attended Chinese schools and did not learn to speak Tibetan or consciously embrace Tibetan culture until he was an adult (Schiaffini-Vedani 2008:204). The state of hybridity may be related to the genre of magical realism, as suggested by Patricia Schiaffini-Vedani, who presents magical realist writing as a natural response to hybridity, a way for Chinese-educated writers to make sense of their native culture (2008:209). Zhaxi Dawa commented on the contradictory complexities of Tibet (quoted in Schiaffini-Vedani 2008:210):

As soon as a writer enters deeply into modern Tibet, s/he will come to forget that what is in front of her/his eyes is reality. S/he will think that it seems more a product of a hallucinating imagination.

Just as Latin American author Gabriel Garcia Marquez wrote in the style of magical realism to react against social realism, perhaps Alai and Zhaxi Dawa are, in effect, reacting against a very dichotomous portrayal of Old Tibet either as a peaceful, pure society or as a backward and violent one in the Chinese state-sponsored media, Hollywood,¹⁵ and Chinese government propaganda.¹⁶ Using complex and fantastical elements to dilute this standard framework, Alai inserts absurd episodes masked by the narrator's 'idiot' identity, undermining the reader's trust in the narrator's perception of reality.

¹⁵ For a discussion of popular perceptions of Tibet in the Western media, see Schell's (2000) description of idealistic and nearly religiously positive perceptions of Tibet among Hollywood stars, intellectuals, and the general public.

¹⁶ The Chinese government presents a view of Tibet diametrically opposed to that of Hollywood enthusiasts. For example, the Chinese Central Newsreel and Documentary Film Studio produced *Xizang wangshi* [*Tibet's Past*] in 2007. This short film highlights the poverty, backwardness, and slave-centered agricultural system of pre-1950 Tibet, themes commonly emphasized in centrally controlled media. In contrast, the narrator of the BBC-produced film *The Lost World of Tibet: A Different View* nostalgically remarks: "[the footage used in this video allows] us to glimpse into a world which has almost entirely disappeared, to a time before the Dalai Lama and his people lost their country."

RED IN TIBETAN CULTURE

One reason for choosing red as a focal metaphor in my analysis is its central role in both Tibetan and Han culture, which also allows Alai to use red in novel, sometimes conflicting ways to juxtapose the two cultures. In Han culture, red is a color related to celebration, the Spring Festival, marriage, and, more recently, New China.¹⁷ According to the *Encyclopedia of Tibetan Symbols and Motifs* by Robert Beer, the color red in Buddhist art represents the "sun's inexhaustible fire," whereas "[t]he sun, as a symbol of pure wisdom, is consumed with fire, yet is not itself consumed. Its external fire is inexhaustible" (Beer 1999:17). Like the Buddhist sun, the sun in *Red Poppies* is a source of wisdom for both the idiot-son and his alter-ego, the Buddhist priest Wangpo Yeshi, who often gaze up at the blazing sun while contemplating philosophical questions. The priest-turned-historian likes to sit under the sun with a bowl of liquor, while the narrator often becomes aware of himself and his surroundings only after sun rays penetrate his room: "I woke up with the sun flickering in my eyes, and discovered that I was sleeping in my childhood room in the very bed I'd slept in as a boy" (Alai 2002:423). As the novel progresses, one senses impending doom - a day when the Tibetan sun, a source of wisdom and enlightenment, will set for the last time and the violent red sun of New China will rise in the sky.

Fire as a Tibetan symbol can be both a creator and a destroyer: "[E]ach *kalpa*, or cosmic cycle of the universe, is believed to end in a penultimate destruction by flood, wind, or fire" (Beer 1999:17). A *kalpa* is infinitely long, and is metaphorically described as the time it takes to empty a ten-mile-square city full of poppy seeds by removing a poppy seed every year (Baroni 2002:174); its end is

¹⁷Mao Zedong famously linked the idea of fire with the destruction of old society when he used the Chinese saying "a single spark can start a prairie fire" in a 1930 letter to Lin Biao describing how the fire of revolution will soon sweep across China and prepare the ground for construction of a New China (Mao 1972:65-76).

often related to red, fiery destruction in Tibetan artwork.¹⁸ When the seemingly endless Maichi lineage is brought to an end under a barrage of fiery artillery shells, their sound is compared to a screaming human voice, evoking images of chaos and terror: "the shriek of artillery fire cut through the air again" (Alai 2002:425). Similarly, the red poppies allow the Maichi family to monopolize food production and acquire incredible wealth, but at the same time subjugate it to the economic demands of the Han government. Thus, red, linked culturally and artistically to fire and to the sun, is a central theme in the novel, highlighted not only by its prominence in the English translation of the title, but also by its connection to several other central symbols and metaphors.

Furthermore, red is also a symbol of the Nyingma Sect of Tibetan Buddhism, also known as the 'Old School' or Red Hat Sect after the red ceremonial hats used by Nyingma monks. It was founded by an Indian monk who migrated to Tibet. Nyingma teachings also assimilated elements of Bon, an indigenous religion that assimilated elements of Buddhism after Buddhism was introduced into Tibet (Stoddard 2013:90). The Gelug Sect became the dominant religious tradition in Tibet until the area was invaded in the mid-20th century. Wangpo Yeshe is a monk of the Gelug Sect, and his beliefs starkly contrast with those of the chieftain, who belongs to the Nyingma Sect (Thurston 2007:77). Wangpo Yeshe, an outside force struggling against local tradition, adheres to the official religious doctrine promoted by Lhasa and is ostracized by the Maichi chieftain. Their different worldviews serve to further underscore the cultural and religious differences between Lhasa and the Jiarong area.

TIBETAN MATERIAL CULTURE AT A CULTURAL CROSSROADS

Red is addressed not only metaphorically, but also concretely as an important color attributed to various Tibetan artifacts. Red objects

¹⁸ For example, a deity is described as having "three eyes blaze like the fire at the end of a *kalpa*" in Richardson (1983:56).

figure prominently in the novel, often as a focal point of attention in a description of the material richness of Jiarong culture. At the same time, they highlight the complex identity of Jiarong Tibetans living at a cultural crossroads, emphasized by the juxtaposition of a dominating red and a palette of other colors.

At the center of the Maichi dining room is a gilded red table surrounded by "Persian rugs with lovely designs in the summer and bearskins in the winter"; dinnerware consists of silverware and coral wineglasses, and the table is decorated with candles from imported wax (Alai 2002:120). The scene is depicted as if it were a photograph of the dining room, a sampling of the Maichi family's riches from all corners of the world. Traditional red Tibetan art is supplemented with a broad spectrum of colorful international items. A similar blend of Han materials and Tibetan craftsmanship is embodied by a red fruit platter:

Rectangular wooden crimson platters decorated with gilded fruit in strange shapes and giant flowers said to be popular in India had been placed before us. They contained porcelain from the Han area and silverware made by our silversmiths. The wineglasses were made of blood red Ceylonese agate (Alai 2002:346).

Yet another example of a focal point of Han-Tibetan contact is the red belt on the Maichi soldiers' uniforms on which bayonets can be sheathed (Alai 2002:111). Traditional Tibetan clothing is being used to hold up bayonets provided by the Han to the Tibetan soldiers. Interestingly, bayonets are not originally Han, but were brought to mainland China from the West, often along with firearms, via India or Burma in the southwest.¹⁹ Red Chinese, emboldened by their civil war victory, used tools once directed against the Qing to assert their influence in the region. Gaining military and political control of Tibet allowed the Han Chinese to lay the foundation for both a slave-liberation and majority-minority historical and cultural framework,

¹⁹ For example, in February 1949 the Tibetan government purchased a large supply of weapons from India in order to battle approaching Communist troops (Goldstein 1989:620).

later established by the PRC government as the dominant national ethnic paradigm.

LOVE AND MADNESS

Red is the color of significant objects, but also as a more literary metaphor representing a variety of universal themes. As previously mentioned, the narrator is born out of the love of his father for a Han prostitute, and it is suggested that his 'insanity' is caused by the unhealthy relationship between his parents: "people said she would give birth to a crazy baby, since the mad, raging love between her and the chieftain had nearly turned them both to ashes" (Alai 20002:101). Here, the term 'raging love' suggests the conceptual metaphor of 'love is fire', a destructive sort of fire. It is supplanted by the more traditional literary metaphor of the fire of love turning people to ashes. The fire that gave rise to the narrator can later be seen as a manifestation of his madness: "flames of madness must have shown in my eyes" (Alai 2002:229). Here, we can see that 'madness is fire'.

The theme of the danger of passionate, fiery love is evident in numerous instances. When the narrator encounters his wife after her affair with the neighboring chieftain, he notes that, "[Tharna was] cast aside after Wangpo had flung her into the flames of lust, in which she'd been badly burned" (Alai 2002:401). Here, the action of flinging someone into 'flames of lust' suggests not only destruction, but also the victim's helplessness and isolation.

The poppies, of course, are closely related to love and madness. They essentially trigger a series of tumultuous romantic relationships in the novel, including that of the narrator and his maidservant Dolma, and that of the chieftain and his second wife:

The poppies flourished beyond imagining, as we could see from the windows of the house. These plants, which were appearing on our land for the very first time, were so thrilling that they drew out the madness hidden in the people's marrow. Maybe it was their mysterious power that had caused the chieftain to fall so much in love with Yangzom ... And Yangzom, who had just buried her husband, was equally mad (Alai 2002:51).

Poppies play a central metaphorical role in Alai's novel, just as they do in a number of Western works.

POPPIES

In Western literature, poppies have been associated with a variety of mythological phenomena, notably Demeter, the goddess of fertility, and sleep. The poppy is said to be "perfused with Lethean sleep" (Ferber 1999:160). The poppy flower is also associated with oblivion, peaceful death, and, in the works of Oscar Wilde, eroticism (Ferber 1999:161). Such symbolism can be found in a variety of popular works, such as the 1939 cinematic classic *The Wizard of Oz*, in which Dorothy falls asleep in a field of enchanted poppies.

From the moment the poppy flowers open in *Red Poppies*, it is as if everyone is mesmerized by the beautiful poppies, which both empower the Maichi family and symbolize the government's ability to exercise an increasing amount of control on its fate:

[O]ne day the sprouts ripped through the ground and tender buds spread out to form thick leaves shaped like a baby's delicate hands ... When the poppies bloomed, the giant red flowers formed a spectacular carpet across much of Chieftain Maichi's territory. This plant captivated us. How lovely those poppies were! (Alai: 2002:46)

Aside from captivating the narrator with their beauty, the poppies also have a more practical and direct effect, for they increase the sexual desires of men in the Maichi family:

During that first summer, when the poppies took root in our land and produced beautiful flowers, a strange phenomenon occurred - both my father's and my brother's sexual appetites grew stronger than ever. My own desire, which had been awakened in the early spring, now exploded, fed by the vibrant red blossoms of summer (Alai 2002:48).

Here, we can trace two related metaphors: "desire is explosive" and "red blossoms are food." Poppies "feed" the desire in

the sense that they cause it to increase to the point of it being unbearable. Interestingly, the red poppies end up literally replacing planting ground for food after chieftains begin planting poppies instead of barley. The chieftains are misled by the poppies, which eventually fail to bring them revenue and lead to mass starvation.

It is after the arrival of the poppies that the Maichi chieftain grows mad with desire for his servant's wife, whom he takes to be his third wife after having murdered the servant. Meanwhile, he is punished for his act by the poppies, for while he and his third wife are drawn to the poppy field to seek refuge from prying eyes, they are constantly interrupted by people or creatures they encounter. Nevertheless, they still return to the poppy field, where, "with the wind blowing on the new plants, the berries surged in waves like raging sexual desire" (Alai 2002:51). The ripe berries, signaling the plant's readiness to reproduce, are echoed by the Maichi chieftain's own desire. Still unable to find a place to be with his wife, the chieftain is chased by chanting children, and, "as the chieftain's sexual desire turned to flames of rage, the executioner's whip drove off the screaming slaves" (Alai 2002:68). Here again, desire is being described as flames first ignited by the scarlet flowers, an unsatisfied desire avenged by violence.

Nevertheless, the flames of the poppies not only lead to increased desire, but increased chaos as well, masking the evil intentions of the government to the east. Huang, the Han emissary,

wanted to make one chieftain powerful so he could control the others, but Jiang intended for all chieftains to plant poppies, so he could supply them with silver and machine guns, which they would in turn use against one another. Shortly after he arrived, poppies raged like a fire on other chieftains' land (Alai 2002:170).

The poppies are dangerous and out of control, spreading quickly throughout the area. In the interplay between fatalism and free will, the wise Wangpo Yeshi reconciles the external consequences of the poppies with the inevitable internal decline of the Tibetan chiefdoms,

presenting the poppies as a catalyst for the inevitable. After telling the chieftain that the poppies are a torch that will ignite the Maichi estate, Wangpo answers the chieftain's question as to whether he should destroy the poppies: "That won't be necessary. Everything is predestined. The poppies will only make what must happen arrive sooner" (Alai 2002:168). Wangpo predicted the poppies' pivotal role in influencing balances of power in the region.

RED AS A VEHICLE FOR POWER

Fire and the color red are often connected in art and literature. Mastery of and control over fire provides servants of the Maichi estate with a sense of control and serves to increase the Maichi family's power by essentially attracting populations from neighboring estates to their side. While the narrator is managing a trading town on the border with a chiefdom in the midst of a famine, he orders the cook to roast barley, releasing its aroma and tempting the starving people. Of course, fire is central to the process:

Fire is a wonderful thing; it not only burned the grain, but enhanced its aroma by ten- or even a hundredfold, releasing it before the life inside the kernels was extinguished (Alai 2002:199).

We can see the universally common metaphor of 'life is fire', as the life inside the kernels, just as any human life, can be put to an end, or extinguished. This metaphor is consistent with the Chinese original, in which the verb *miewang* 'to extinguish', is used. The first syllable of this word literally means 'to put out'. Both the Chinese and English languages, in the phrase 'life is extinguished', allow and even demand the same conceptual metaphor.

When it is decided to feed the starving people, Dolma, the cook, hands out food ever more enthusiastically:

now Dolma had gotten a taste of power. I think she liked it; otherwise, she wouldn't have kept wielding the charitable ladle

even after she was tired and drenched in sweat (Alai 2002:245-6).

In a way, this is the result of a chain of power transfer with poppies as the top link. In this case, it is the *absence* of poppies and thus the presence of large amounts of barley that allows the Maichi family to subjugate its neighbors. In Daoist manner, using the absence of a thing here is more important than having it. Poppies, a tool for colonization, are used by the already economically trapped Jiarong Tibetans to control others. The Maichi become a middleman between the Han and other Tibetans, again playing an intermediary role consistent with their historical situation.

Related to power, violence is a way for the Maichi family to exercise certain forms of control; nevertheless, it is the poppies and control over their distribution that allows the Maichi family to manipulate power in the region most effectively. Traditional forms of Tibetan warfare cannot compete with larger socioeconomic forces and modern weaponry.

RED FOR VIOLENCE

Violent acts are an integral part of the everyday existence of the Maichi family, whose household has a permanent, hereditary executioner. Tasks performed by the executioner, such as cutting off the Buddhist priest's tongue as punishment, are described matter-of-factly, but without neglecting their contradictory nature, lending a feeling of grotesque magic to the job amid the overall realistic daily life of the family. Whereas executions are performed routinely and decisions about them made quickly, they are not without consequence:

Every time someone was executed, our household was shrouded in a strange atmosphere, even though everyone looked as normal as any other day ... Killing people was nothing we shied away from, but afterward, our hearts would still be uneasy ... if you still don't believe me, then you should share a meal with us

after the execution order is given. You'd see that we drank more water than usual and ate less food. The meat was hardly touched, maybe a symbolic bite or two at most (Alai 2002:106).

It is precisely this detached, absurd feeling surrounding executions that renders the descriptions of violence much more contextualized and nearly humanistic, avoiding a straightforward condemnation of the barbaric ways of Old Tibet.

Red is a prominent color used to symbolize violence, playing a decisive, manipulative role in numerous violent scenes. For example, after the poppy-stealing servant of the neighboring chieftain Wangpo is captured, "his head is cut off and placed in red cloth" (Alai 2002:130). It is this head that, through the Wangpo chieftain's cunning plan, the repatriated head is then planted, and poppies sprout from the ears. Apparently, the servant, knowing of his approaching end and foreseeing the Wangpo chieftain's actions, managed to hide poppy seeds in his ears. It is precisely the servant's bloody, gruesome execution that was necessary for Wangpo's plot to be carried to its completion. Almost perversely, the severed head provides an ideal environment for the germination of the red flowers.

In another instance, a robe stained with an executed man's blood turns from red to purple in the sun's rays. This seems to dominate the narrator's actions: "it wasn't me, but my purple garment, that felt like walking" (Alai 2002:324). This impacts not only his actions but also his perception of the surroundings:

Now everything before me was tinted with shades of purple. The river, the mountains, the fields, the estate house, the trees, and dry grass were all shrouded in a film of purple, with a tinge of slightly fading, aging blood red (Alai 2002:315).

The agency of the eerie garment is transferred to a potential murderer waiting outside. It is when the narrator flings his robe out through the window and it lands on the murderer by chance that the man decides to complete his deed and murder the Maichi chieftain's older son, because "the purple garment kept pushing him in the direction of the old chieftain's room" (Alai 2002:332).

The purple garment also serves to re-emphasize the almost absurd role of chance in the novel. It is simply because the robe happens to land on the murderer's head that he commits the deed. Likewise, at the end of the novel, the author just happens to ask his own potential murderer, brother of his brother's assassin, what his clan name is, once again raising a central questions related to identity: "What is your name?" (Alai 2002:433). It is this question alone that leads to the hesitating murderer to pierce his dagger into the narrator's body, paralleling the murder of the 'idiot's' older brother. Perhaps this second death is not truly a matter of chance. Perhaps the narrator, who has had a prophetic feeling about his approaching end, feels this is the moment and, maybe subconsciously, provides the motive for his own murder.

The effect of some violent episodes is softened with fantastical elements reminiscent of magical realism. The term 'magical realism', although sometimes criticized as a vestige of a post-colonialist mindset, is often applied to writers such as Gabriel Garcia Marques, Gunter Grass, and John Fowles (see Abrams 1993). Magical events related to violence are interspersed throughout *Red Poppies*. For example, the folk historian Wangpo Yeshi learns how to speak even after his tongue is cut off; the dog that catches the severed portion of Wangpo Yeshi's tongue falls to the ground as if poisoned; and magic pills given to the narrator by a neighboring chieftain produce a mysterious physical reaction. The insertion of magical moments in a generally realistic narration allows Alai to achieve a delicate balance between an idealized, magical Shangri La and an overly realistic, negative portrayal of Old Tibet.

RED AND WHITE

Some critics do not agree that Alai's message is a balanced one. According to Baranovitch (2008), some commentators, such as Tibetan writer and filmmaker Tenzing Sonam, maintain that Alai upholds the official description of how Tibet was 'liberated' by the

Red Army in *Red Poppies* (Baranovitch 2002:171). Yet it appears that Alai creates at least a complex, and perhaps even a pro-Tibetan depiction of the relationship between Tibetans and Han. Of course, the narrator's mother, a central character, is of Han origin, but she is assimilated into Tibetan culture and thus does not share many cultural characteristics with Han arriving from the east.

As the trading town founded by the idiot-son expands, it eventually acquires a brothel run by Han prostitutes. It is these prostitutes that, in addition to the already-prominent poppies, bring yet another Han affliction, this time a disease characterized by a red nose:

When I reached the bridge, I was face-to-face with the chieftains. I saw that many of their noses were redder than before. Yes, I thought, they've contracted syphilis from the girls. I laughed. I laughed at their ignorance of what the girls were carrying. (Alai 2002: 394)

In this way, Old Tibet is viewed as a land where, although men in power displayed loose sexual behavior, syphilis was unknown until it was brought by Han prostitutes, who infected the chieftains.²⁰

The theme of contamination appears in other passages as well. In his rich descriptions of Tibetan material culture, Alai details with great care the vibrant facades of Tibetan architecture:

White permeated our lives. If you had looked at the stone and rammed-earth houses and temples in the chieftain's territory, you'd have seen how much we liked this simple color. Sparkling white quartz was piled above the doorframes and on the windowsills, while the doors and windows were accented in clean,

²⁰ Venereal disease, whether real or mythical, seems to be a common negative association with unfamiliar foreigners. In nineteenth-century America, for example, immoral Chinese women were represented as infecting white men with exotic diseases (Wong 1978:vii):

Whites generally accepted the idea, for instance, that Chinese women in the United States . . . were so debased as to offer their services, at discounted rates, to white schoolboys, imparting in the process a foreign and a presumably exotic strain of venereal disease.

pure white... But now I saw a different kind of white. Sticky whiteness oozed from poppy berries and gathered in a jiggly mass before falling to the ground. The poppies squeezed out their white sap as if the earth were crying. (Alai 2002:79)

The pure, Tibetan white is replaced by the oozing, sticky sap from the poppy plants, perhaps representing the white Kuomintang army, a sort of contamination. The narrator's gaze, just like the focus of daily life in the area, shifts from traditional Tibetan constructions to cultivating the profitable poppy plant.

It is toward the end of the novel, upon the arrival of the Red Army, that a complete inundation with red occurs. It is here that the narrator perceives the difference most clearly between the Han people he has known, such as the Han emissaries and his mother, and the arriving Han, to whom he refers as the 'colored Han':

the colored Han were different - they wanted to dye our land with their own colors ... If the Red Han won the civil war, I heard that they wanted even more to stain every piece of land in that color they revered" (Alai 2002:391-2).

Like a contagious disease, the red color threatens to spread throughout the Maichi land, and we can see here a metaphor of 'red is Han communists'. Eventually, the Red Han win against the White Han (Kuomintang Army), and destroy the Maichi estate house in a shelling. Moments before the final scene, the intuitive narrator provides a foreboding description emphasizing the connection between the Red Han and their destructive fire: "Off in the distance, the Red Han lit bonfires, their flames licking the night sky like the flags they fought under" (Alai 2002:422). Fire, destruction, and Communist symbolism converge in the Tibetan sky.

CONCLUSION: RED AND THE COMPLEXITIES OF ETHNIC IDENTITY

In *Red Poppies*, red is the color of passion and of the Red Han, but also of traditional Tibetan items and beliefs. The year 1949 is often associated in Chinese media with the Red Army marching westward and of a red Communist flag rising over New China. "The East is Red, the sun rises," proclaimed a song during the Cultural Revolution, referring to Mao Zedong and the Party rising over China like a red sun. By using the color red in a complex fashion to represent both Han and Tibetan themes, as well as more complex inter and intra-ethnic distinctions, Alai employs a tool of official propaganda for his own means, creating metaphors that appear in a more subtle, complex, and implicit fashion than when used by propaganda organs, underscoring the lack of subtlety in explicit political symbolism. When Alai *does* portray the Red Han, it is as intruders who bring foreign values and foreign diseases to Tibet, rather than as glorious liberators.

Wang (2013) interprets Alai's message as a counter-narrative to slave liberation, but perhaps it is more complex. Alai situates Jiarong Tibetans in a pluralistic cultural framework, as one of many coexisting cultures, in contrast to the linear Marxist framework proposed by the Chinese government. At the same time, he also depicts the daily life of Jiarong Tibetans, certain aspects of which were quite violent, bringing into question Western idealization of Tibetan daily life as well as romanticized Han portrayal of minorities as feminine, weak, and embracing of the Han majority. The latter may be essential for the Chinese government's Han-centered national ethnic paradigm, and perhaps even to constructing Han identity and the identity of the Chinese nation (Gladney 1994).

Ethnic distinctions and political hierarchies do emerge in Alai's work from contact between Han and Tibetans. However, it is not the Han nationality that is emphasized but the complex and changing identity of Jiarong Tibetans. The constant shifts in perspective and in metaphor use and even our reluctance to completely trust the 'idiot' narrator all contribute to the work's modern qualities. As perspectives shift, the social, political, and

cultural implications of the color red are refitted for that purpose. For readers of the novel's English translation, unusual translation choices, using words associated with medieval Europe, also give the work a western feel. Alai's work provides a multidimensional depiction of Tibetan identity, addressing the very notions of ethnicity, nationality, and China's official ethnic discourse.

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NON-ENGLISH TERMS

Aba 阿坝

Alai 阿来

Chen'ai luoding 尘埃落定

Gelug [Dge lugs] དགེ་ལུགས།

Han 汉

Huang

Hui 回

Jiarong 嘉绒

kalpa, skal pa སྐལ་པ།

Kuomintang, Guomindang 国民党

Lhasa ལྷ་ས།

Lin Biao 林彪

Maichi 麦琪

Mao Zedong 毛泽东

miewang 灭亡

Nying ma ལྷིང་མ་།

Tsong kha pa ཅོང་ཁ་པ།

Qing 清

Zhaxi Dawa 扎西達娃

TIBETANS, CAMELS, YURTS, AND SINGING TO THE
SALT GODDESSES: AN A MDO ELDER
REFLECTS ON LOCAL CULTURE

Wenchangjia (Kawa Namgyal, Kha ba rnam rgyal,
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ABSTRACT

Historical camel herding and use in Mang ra (Guinan) County, Mtsho lho (Hainan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon (Qinghai) Province, China is described through the recollections of Rin chen skyid (1919-2011) and other lifelong residents of the area. Yurts and salt collecting and culture are also described. Three maps and four photographs provide additional information.

KEYWORDS

A mdo, Mang ra (Guinan), Tibetan camel herding, Tibetan yurts

Figure 1. Rin chen skyid with a prayer wheel (photograph by CK Stuart).



Figure 2. Rin chen skyid's family (CK Stuart).



Figure 3 (numbered below) at their home in 2004 (CK Stuart). 1 Bkra shis skyid (b. 1978), 2 Wenchangjia (b. 1980), 3 Dkon mchog tshe brtan (b. 1982), 4 Khyi lo thar (b. 1970), 5 Lcags thar rgyal (b. 1942), 6 Dpal mo skyid (b. 1988), 7 Skal bzang skyid (b. 1985), 8 Tshe log (b. 1990), 9 Chos rgyas rdo rje (b. 1993), 10 Rdo rje skyid (b. 1947), 11 Rin chen skyid (1919-2011), and 12 'Khon thar skyid (b. 2000).



Figure 4. Dpa' chen rgyal (b. 1976) owned the camels pictured below in 2010. On the left is his wife, Tshe thar skyid (b. 1978). On the right is Dpa' chen rgyal's brother's wife, Sang rgyas skyid (b. 1991) (photo by Snying lcags rgyal, Bon skor herding area, Bya mdo (Shagou) Township,¹ 24 February 2010).



INTRODUCTION²

Heller (2006) writes that "The camel is virtually unknown in Tibetan literature...". However, this animal is not totally unknown in Tibetan areas, e.g., Bellezza (2012) describes depictions of camels in Upper Tibetan rock art and Dorjey Angchok et al. (2012) describe the endangered camel population in Ladakh. In addition, in his autobiographical account of life in an A mdo herding community, Snying lcags rgyal (Nangchukja 2011:33-35) describes his childhood experience of riding a camel and falling off.

In 2004, to learn more about the experience of camel use in the Bon skor area, we interviewed Rin chen skyid (1919-2011),

¹ For locations, see the maps in Appendix 1.

² We thank Bsod nams dbang rgyal, Gabriela Samcewicz, Daniel Miller, and AHP editors for providing assistance in writing this paper.

Wenchangjia's maternal grandmother, with whom he lived with from 1985 to 2005. Wenchangjia writes:

Time has passed since her death and I wish that I had spent more time with her and had learned more about her life. The material below is fragmentary, but does feature information about *gur*³ 'yurts' that local people used in the pre-1958 era, and also about camels that many families used. In writing this, I also chatted with my father (b. 1942), mother (b. 1947), Dpa' rtse 'bum (b. 1969), and Rdo rje 'bum (b. 1980). They are all, with the exception of Rdo rje 'bum,⁴ native herders of Bon skor Tibetan Village, Bya mdo Township, Mang ra (Guinan) County, Mtsho lho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon (Qinghai) Province, PR China.

In the first section, Rin chen skyid briefly describes her life, including childhood, marriage, work, and difficult times. This provides a context for the following material that includes camels and yurts.

NAMES AND FAMILY MEMBERS⁵

I have two names. The first is Rin chen skyid. My *gces ming* 'nickname' was Pa thas skyid. I was born in Pho rog gad pa 'Raven Gully'⁶ (in 1919). My older sister, Glang kho, is eight years older than me (b. 1911).⁷ She now lives in a herding area of Bon skor Village.

³ Term used by locals.

⁴ Rdo je 'bum was born and brought up in a different village.

⁵ Rin chen skyid provided the information that appears here until the end of the article, which we supplemented with information from informal conversations with local elders. The final part about salt stations is presented by Wenchangjia.

⁶ Pho rog gad pa is located in today's Mda' bzhi (Haiyan) County, Mtsho byang (Haibei) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture.

⁷ Glang kho was living in 2014.

The Mda' bzhi Tribe lived in the area where I was born. I have many relatives in Mda' bzhi but I've not seen them for a long time.⁸

My mother died when I was twelve years old.

I met my husband before my father escorted me from Si me cha rim⁹ to my husband's home in Mi'u ho.¹⁰ These two places are situated at the foot of different sides of the same mountain in a remote area. People only traveled by horses or donkeys, and there were few paths. It took about five hours to go between these two places at that time.

My husband, 'Bum phyug rgyal, was one year older than me (b. 1918) and died in 1972. Our marriage was not arranged by our families. I brought nothing to his home except the horse that I rode. When I came to my husband's home there were my husband's parents and, of course, my husband, in the family. My mother-in-law, Dbang mo mtsho, was born in about 1895 and died when I was thirty. My father-in-law, La bho, was born in about 1892 and died in 1962.

When I first came to my husband's home, his family owned nineteen goats. His family members wore goatskin and sheepskin robes.

My husband and my husband's father were blacksmiths. They bought metal in Khri ka County Town, brought it home, and made shears for cutting sheep wool. These shears were very sharp and were locally well-known. Many people came to our home to buy the shears.

My own father was forty when my mother died. He did not marry again because he thought to do would have been a sin. This is a difference between older generations and people today. My family moved to Bon po zhing kha,¹¹ which has now been inundated by a hydroelectric reservoir.

The years of terrible starvation started in 1958. I helped my relatives harvest their crops and I also worked for other people. There were, for example, some Han families near there on the other side of a mountain that faces the Yellow River. We were a herding family and I helped others harvest, partly because I was paid with some of the crops.

⁸ The distance between where she was born and where she lived in Bon skor was about 350 kilometers.

⁹ As the result of land division in 2002, this location is now included in Mang chu Town.

¹⁰ In today's Bya mdo Township, Mang ra County.

¹¹ In today's Bya mdo Township.

Some families in Bon po zhing kha had seven to eight *mu*¹² of farmland. My family didn't farm because we lacked enough people to do the farming. This was an agro-pastoral area. Some families only herded, some only farmed, and some did both.

At least one day of riding fast on a horse was needed to go from here, where I live today, to Bon po zhing kha. If you weren't in a hurry the journey could be done in two days.¹³

I know only a few words of Chinese.

There were times when I dug potatoes for others because it did not involve all that much work and there was no particular time requirement. We could work at our own pace. I also knew the people I was working for. We herders pitied farmers. Their lives were difficult because their diet didn't include meat and dairy products. Not only were we paid in potatoes, but digging potatoes was also enjoyable because we rarely did such work and it was something different to do for a short time.

Later, we lived for only, at most, fifteen days in the farming place in Bon po zhing kha during harvest time. I am unsure about how many *mu* of land we cultivated at that time, but we did not have much land. In the beginning we grew only wheat and barley. We put the grain in bags and, if it rained, we put the bags under straw. After we harvested the crops, we loaded the grain on camels, and returned to our herding place. Camels did not damage the crops because they were kept away.

Later we cultivated barley, wheat, beans, rapeseed, potatoes, and a few vegetables. We used steers, mules, or donkeys to plow the land.

After the reservoir was built, people from Bon po zhing kha moved about thirty kilometers south to Be lan¹⁴ and made it their new farming place. However, harvests in this new place are smaller because the soil isn't as fertile and it is at higher elevation.

Mu ge thang¹⁵ is the name of the place where I live today (2004).

¹² Fifteen *mu* are equivalent to approximately one hectare.

¹³ It is a distance of about seventy kilometers along a zigzag, mountain path.

¹⁴ In today's Bya mdo Township, Mang ra County.

¹⁵ There is disagreement on how to write this name in Tibetan. *Mu ge* means 'starvation' and *thang* means 'plain', thus 'Mu ge thang' means 'Land of Starvation, which is considered an inauspicious name. Some locals therefore prefer to use Smug gi thang 'Foggy Plain'. Elders describe this place as once teeming with flora and fauna and having much fog and rain in summer.

The place where I herded in the late 1970s to early 1980s was toward the end of the Sgro sgang¹⁶ Mountain Range where there are many valleys and rocky mountains. Today, this is in Bya mdo Township. I mostly herded goats there. I was very good at it and had about 500 goats at one time. My family and I were given a *jiang zhuang* (*bya dga'*) 'award' from the local county government. We were very proud of that award.

CAMELS

When I was a little girl my family had thirty or forty camels. Some families had many more – eighty or ninety – while other families had none at all. Those with none borrowed camels from others. Some families had none because the camels were difficult to care for, especially the calves, which were weaker than other young animals and more prone to get diarrhea.

If a family had around forty camels, then about fifteen were working camels. There was generally one uncastrated camel in a herd.

We didn't kill camels because we thought the camel represented the twelve animals of the zodiac. A story says the camel was given its teeth by the tiger, mouth by the rabbit, neck by the dragon, eyes by the snake, mane by the horse, stomach by the sheep, body hair by the monkey, hind legs by the rooster, alertness by the dog, tail by the pig, ears by the mouse, and hooves by the bull.

Yaks can't live here because it's too hot and yaks' eyes don't function well in hot weather. Because there were no tractors or trucks, we used camels to carry chests, tents, food, and leather bags whenever we moved. We didn't use horses. Camels could carry three to four times as much as horses. We also used camel hair, which we took in late spring, for various purposes. For example, a camel's short body hair is very good for stopping a nosebleed. We called it *sman rtsa chen* 'precious medicine'. We also occasionally used camel hair to make warm winter clothing.

However, beginning in the 1980s till to the early twenty-first century, most of the land in this area was plowed and used to cultivate rapeseed by resettled outsiders. This led to dust storms, loss in soil fertility, and a decrease in flora and fauna, which explains the term 'Land of Starvation'. Mu ge thang is in Bya mdo Township.

¹⁶ Alternatively, Sgyo sgang.

There are two kinds of camel hair: short hair and longer hair from the mane. The mane hair was used to make rope while the short body hair was sold to Han Chinese merchants. I don't know where they were from. We could sell it most anywhere. One *jin*¹⁷ of camel hair at that time would bring nine or ten *yuan*. Maybe today that doesn't sound like a lot, but money then was not like it is today. Today, even a thousand *yuan* is not a lot of money.

It was difficult to tell camels apart. They are like donkeys – hard to differentiate. We estimated the age of camels by looking at their teeth,¹⁸ and named them according to their age and sex. Male camels had the following names:

<i>a tha</i>	male camel
<i>nga gseb</i>	uncastrated
<i>nga rte'u</i>	one year old calf ¹⁹
<i>nga thor</i>	two year old
<i>nyis langs</i>	castration year or three-year-old
<i>nga rgye'u; phog bzhi</i>	four year old
<i>gcig ga</i>	five year old

Female camels had these names, based on age:

<i>mo nga</i>	female camel
<i>nga rte'u</i>	one year old calf
<i>thor mo</i>	two year old
<i>rgya mo</i>	three year old
<i>bzhi mo</i>	four year old
<i>gcig ga</i>	five year old

Some camels didn't have two humps – they had just one. Camel humps are fatty. If a camel's humps fall in different directions, it is called *so li*. If its humps fall in the same direction, it is called *nog yo*. If the humps stand up – an indication of being fat and strong – there is no specific name. Mother camels usually gave birth every three to five years and less frequently as they became older. If a camel gave birth every year, it was considered unlucky because it was unusual, and the family needed to chant. Because most camels didn't calve every year, it meant that the camel was even more valuable to us.

¹⁷ One *jin* = 0.5 kilograms.

¹⁸ For more on estimating the age of camels by examining their teeth, see <http://www.camelsaust.com.au/liveage.htm> (accessed 25 August 2013).

¹⁹ *Rnga rte'u* was used for both male and female one-year-old calves.

We milked the camels. If the mother camel had a lot of milk then the calf would have the scours. We milked them so the calves wouldn't be sick. To do this we tied their legs with a rope and someone would stand a distance away holding the rope while the camel was milked. We didn't use the milk to make butter but only to make milk tea.

Before 1958, there were trees and bushes around here, and we kept camel calves and the older camels separated so that the mothers wouldn't wander off with their calves. Camels needed to be watered less frequently than other livestock.

Camels are very difficult to manage and camel calves are difficult to care for. You also need a lot of land with forests and bushes because camels eat a great deal. They put several branches in their mouths, strip off the leaves and eat them. These days, however, there are few bushes so it is impossible to take good care of camels.

Camels were usually broken in when they were three to four years old. It was very difficult the first time to tie the camel legs with rope. After the camel was made to lie down, a person would sit on its neck and then make a hole through its nose for a nose peg. Before it could be completely broken in, we put a halter on the camel and patted it. It took at least one month to tame a camel.

If one camel left its herd, the others would bark to the lone camel and it would return. And if a camel was lost, the others would cry and the lost camel would come back.

We used camels to travel to Lha sa. Some people my age went there, and a *bla ma* from this place also went to Lha sa. Camels were ridden and used to carry supplies. When the camels got tired, they had to be rested for some days or they would not work well.²⁰

Salt was collected from Wu yi tshwa mtsho.²¹ My community had its own small salt station there from which we collected salt. We needed to give salt to the camels.²² We went

²⁰ Potts (2005), citing Gauthier-Pilters and Dagg (1981:6), reports that Bactrians were able to function at altitudes up to 4,000 meters above sea level.

²¹ It lies south of today's Chaka Town in Wulan County, Mtsho nub Mongolian and Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture. *Wu* 'bubble'; *yi*, as used here, is a conjunction; *tshwa* 'salt'; *mtsho* 'lake'.

²² According to Lensch (1999), a Bactrian camel needs to ingest sixty to 120 grams of salt daily. Camels with access to saline plants refuse other food. They become emaciated if their diet lacks salt, though large supplies of salt-

there, loaded the salt on the camels, and then took it to Stong skor (Huangyuan) to sell. Older people went on these salt-collecting trips. I never went. They needed to travel for more than ten days to get there.

We also herded horses, but we never milked them.

YURTS AND A MONGOLIAN CONNECTION

I'm not sure, but many years ago, maybe there was a religious specialist, and he went to a Mongolian leader. That leader had a problem. When his wives gave birth, the children died. This religious specialist solved this problem, and so in gratitude, the leader gave him many people and animals. Those people were probably Mongolian, because the leader and his people were Mongolian.²³

I heard that people counted in Mongolian when they pitched the yurt and made felt. A long time ago, many people would gather and make yurts. When I was a child, many people came to one family, made a yurt and, after they finished, the family would kill a ewe, divide the meat into pieces, and give it to helpers.

I lived in a yurt. We had yurts until 1958. After that, there was social chaos and we lost the yurts. It took a lot of wood to make a yurt. Poplar wood isn't good for yurts. After 1958, many people came here and cut down all the trees so we couldn't make yurts any more. Also, before 1958 there were many carpenters, but after that there were none.

Yurts are much better than black yak-hair tents. When you are in a yurt and it is windy, you just hear the wind blow. But when you are in a tent, you feel the wind blow.

We used these words to describe the parts of the yurt:

<i>termi</i>	wall sections (The biggest yurt had eight <i>termi</i> .)
<i>harach</i>	skylight
<i>une</i>	roof poles ²⁴

free food are available. Salt-deprived camels become weak, their fatty humps shrink to one-third of their original size, and they can no longer transport heavy loads over long distances.

²³ For a longer account of these events, see Nangchukja (2011:5-10).

²⁴ Juha Janhunen comments:

When we made the yurts, we sang a song that had some Mongolian words, but I've forgotten most of it and I never knew what it meant. It's something like, "*cho na ni ge, cho na ne mo.*" It doesn't make any sense in Tibetan.

...

Rdo rje 'bum (b. 1980), the son of Rta kho, originally from Bon skor Village, had been to Wu yi tshwa mtsho and also talked to elders who had been there. He shared his memories:

Many decades ago, many Tibetan tribes in A mdo had their own *tshwa sgo* 'salt station' around Wu yi tshwa mtsho Lake. Religious activities such as burning *bsang* and aspersing lake water into the sky were done to venerate this lake, which was believed to be a lake where 1,000 goddesses lived. Such ritual was thought to delight the goddesses, who would then give more salt.

Each time water wells were ready for the salt to be extracted, bubbles appeared on the surface. The lake was then praised to also please the goddesses. The praise was an offering to the deities. However, today machines collect the salt.

The beginning lines of the praise verse are:

ལུ་ཡི་ཚྭ་མཚོ་དཀར་མོ།
ལྷ་མོ་སྤང་གི་བླ་མཚོ།

wu yi tshwa mtsho dkar mo
lha mo stong gi bla mtsho

harach - skylight = /xarac/ < xaraac < *xaraaci* 'smoke hole in tent'; *une* - roof poles = /ün/ ~ /uny/ < *uni* 'roof pole'; *termi* - wall sections = /term/ < terem ~ *terme* 'wall section' < 'wall'. Moreover, these are specifically Western Mongolian/ Oirat words. Only *uni* 'roof pole' is widely used in other Mongolian dialects, while the other two concepts are expressed by the words *xan* < *xana* 'wall section' and *toon* < *toono* 'smoke hole'. The words used by Rin chen skyid are, however, well documented in, for example, the Oirat (Kalmuck) dictionary of GJ Ramstedt. As the Mongols of Qinghai are all originally Oirat, it is understandable that they use Oirat words.

the soul lake of one thousand goddesses
it is the white salt lake of Wu²⁵

CONCLUSION

Snying lcags rgyal describes the present situation of camels in Byamdo Township:²⁶

In 2010, there were about five camels across Bon skor herding areas. In 2014, there were only three female camels. The male camels had died. The camels were used to fetch water from the Yellow River, about three to five kilometers away, and to haul bags of flour, daily-use items, and belongings when moving between winter and summer pastures.

What was the historical use of camels in Tibetan areas and what factors determined that use? Detailed studies of Tibetan communities that owned camels, including in-depth interviews with elders who remember the details of camel management, would be valuable to better understand variation in Tibetan communities across the Plateau. The advanced age of elders who remember the details of camel management and use emphasizes the urgency of such studies as a long era of camel ownership and use among at least some Tibetan communities comes to an end.

²⁵ Ulrike Koch's film *The Saltmen of Tibet* features a song for scraping the salt and another one for sewing the sacks closed before they are loaded onto yaks (Turran 1998).

²⁶ Personal communication (email), 17 January 2014.

APPENDIX: MAPS

Map 1. Mtsho sngon (Qinghai) Province²⁷



- 1 Mtsho nub (Haixi) Mongolian and Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture
- 2 Mtsho byang (Haibei) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture
- 3 Zi ling (Xining) City (provincial level city)
- 4 Haidong City (provincial level city)
- 5 Mtsho lho (Hainan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture
- 6 Rma lho (Huangnan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture
- 7 Yul shul (Yushu) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture
- 8 Mgo log (Guoluo) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture

²⁷ This and other maps are altered versions of Maggern (2014), a public domain resource.

Map 2. Mtsho lho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture



- 1 Gser chen (Gonghe) County
- 2 'Ba' rdzong (Tongde) County
- 3 Khri ka (Guide) County
- 4 Brag dkar (Xinghai) County
- 5 Mang ra (Guinan) County

Map 3. Mang ra County²⁸



- [A] Thar shul (Taxiu) Township
- [B] Sum mdo (Sengduo) Township
- [C] Bya mdo (Shagou) Township
- [D] Mang ra (Mangla) Township
- [E] Mang chu (Mangqun) Town
- [F] Mgo mang (Guomaying) Town

²⁸ Locations are approximate.

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NON-ENGLISH TERMS

'Ba' rdzong འབའ་རྫོང་། (Tongde xian 同德县)

'Bum phyug rgyal འབུམ་ཕྱུག་རྒྱལ་།

'Khon thar skyid འཁོན་ཐར་སྐྱིད་།

A

A mdo ཨ་མདོ།

a tha ཨ་ཐ།

B

Be lan བེ་ལན།

Bkra shis skyid བཀ་ཤིས་སྐྱིད་།

bla ma བླ་མ།

Bon po zhing kha བོན་པོ་ཞིང་ཁ།

Bon skor Village བོན་སྐོར་སྡེ་བ།

Brag dkar བྲག་དག་ར། (Xinghai 兴海)

bsang བསང་།

Bsod nams dbang rgyal བསོད་ནམས་དབང་རྒྱལ་།

Bya mdo བྱ་མདོ། (Shagou 沙沟)

Bzhi mo བཞི་མོ།

C

Chaka ཇ་ཀ་ Town (Tshwa kha ཇུ་ཁ།)

Chos rgyas rdo rje ཇོས་རྒྱལ་ར་ར་རྟེ་རྒྱལ་།

co na ne mo ཙོ་ན་ནེ་མོ།

co na ni ge ཙོ་ན་ནེ་གེ།

D

Dkon mchog tshe brtan དཀོན་མཆོག་ཚེ་བདུན།
Dpal mo skyid དཔལ་མོ་སྒྲིད།
Dbang mo mtsho དབང་མོ་མཚོ།
Dpa' rtse 'bum དཔའ་རྩེ་འབུམ།

G

gces ming གཅེས་མིང།
gcig ga གཅིག་ག།
Glang kho གླང་ཁོ།
Gser chen གསེར་ཆེན། (Gonghe 共和)
gur གུར།

H

harach, xarac, xaraac, xaraaci

J

jiang zhuang 奖状 (*bya dga'* བྱ་དགའ།)
jin 斤

K

Kawa Namgyal, Kha ba rnam rgyal ཁ་བ་ནམ་གྲུལ།
Khri ka ཁྲི་ཀ། (Guide 贵德)
Khyi lo thar ཁྲི་ལོ་ཐར།

L

La bho ལ་བོ།
Lcags thar rgyal ལྷགས་ཐར་རྒྱལ།
lha mo stong gi bla mtsho ལྷ་མོ་སྟོང་གི་བླ་མཚོ།
Lha sa ལྷ་ས། City

M

Mang chu མང་ཆུ། (Mangqu 茫曲)
Mang ra མང་ར། (Mangla 茫拉, Guinan 贵南)
Mda' bzhi མདའ་བཞི། (Haiyan 海晏)

Mda' tshan tsho ba bzhi མདའ་ཚན་ཚོ་བ་བཞི།

Mgo mang མགོ་མང་། (Guomaying 过马营)

Mi'u ho མི་ལུ་ཧོ།

Minzu University of China (Zhongyang minzu daxue 中央民族大学)

mo rnga མོ་རང་།

Mtsho byang མཚོ་བྱང་། (Haibei 海北)

Mtsho lho མཚོ་ལྷོ།

Mtsho sngon མཚོ་སྒོན། (Qinghai 青海)

mu ཡུ།

Mu ge thang ཡུ་གེ་ཐང་།

N

nog yo ལོག་ཡོ།

nyis langs ཉིས་ལང་།

P

Pa thas skyid པ་ཐས་སྐྱིད།

Pho rog gad pa ཕོ་རོག་གད་པ།

phog bzhi ཕོག་བཞི།

R

Rab 'og རབ་འོག་

Rdo rje skyid རོ་རྩེ་སྐྱིད།

Rin chen skyid རིན་ཆེན་སྐྱིད།

rgya mo རྒྱ་མོ།

rnga gseb རྒྱ་གསེབ།

rnga rgye'u རྒྱ་རྒྱེ་ལུ།

rnga rte'u རྒྱ་རྟེ་ལུ།

rnga thor རྒྱ་ཐོར།

Rta kho རྟ་ཁོ།

S

Sgro sgang སྒོ་སྒང་།

Sgyo sgang སྒྱོ་སྒང་།

Shaanxi Normal University (Shaanxi shifan daxue 陕西师范大学)

Si me cha rim སི་མེ་ཅཾ་རིམ།

skad khang chad chad སྐད་ཀྲང་ཅཱད་ཅཱད་ཀྱི་རྒྱུ་།

sman rtsa chen སྐམ་རྩ་ཅེན།

Smug gi thang སྐུག་གི་ཐང་།

so li སོ་ལི།

Stong 'khor སྟོང་འཁོར། (Huangyuan 湟源)

Sum mdo སུམ་མདོ། (Sengduo 森多)

T

termi, terem, terme

Thar shul ཐར་ཤུལ། (Taxiu 塔秀)

thor mo ཐོར་མོ།

Tshal rnga 'gag ཐཤ་རྒྱལ་ཀ་ག་ (Longyangxia 龙羊峡)

Tshe log ཐཤེ་ལོག།

tshwa sgo ཐཤའ་སྒོ།

U

une, ün, uny, uni

W

Wenchangjia 文昌加, Bun khrang rgyal བུན་ཁྲང་རྒྱལ།

Wu yi tshwa mtsho ལུ་ཡི་ཐཤའ་མཚོ།

Wu yi tshwa mtsho dkar mo ལུ་ཡི་ཐཤའ་མཚོ་དཀར་མོ།

Wulan 乌兰 County

Y

yuan 元

LITERATURE

A SMALL PIECE OF TURQUOISE

Nyima Gyamtsan

My friend, who I will call Tashi, told me this story about running away from his home in the grasslands of Trika, to Lhasa. I've embellished certain aspects of the story, but also left out certain events. Although based on reality, this story should be considered fictional.

Through the long dreary days of another semester at school, I had become fixated on the idea of going to Lhasa. But how could I tell my parents? I decided to wait for the upcoming holiday, and thought long and hard about what I would say to them.

When I got home from the boarding school where I was studying, my parents asked me about my studies. As she always did whenever I came from school for the holidays, Mother made a big meal of beef dumplings, my favorite food.

While we were having dinner, I told them my plan for the summer holiday.

"What did you say?" Father said suspiciously.

"I want to go to a monastery to study Tibetan during the summer vacation," I said bravely.

At first, Father didn't agree. "Don't lie to me. Boys always want to do this and that. If you want to study, you should study in school and at home. Why do you want to go to a monastery to study?" Father asked impatiently.

"It's really different there. There are many scholars in the monastery. But in school..." I started.

Father interrupted, "I know that – don't talk so much!"

The house was very quiet for a moment. Mother then gently spoke to Father, emphasizing how helpful and important studying in the monastery would be for me. He didn't say anything. Our house grew still again.

Finally, Father said, "OK, it's up to you."

Three days later, I went to Trika County Town and then

immediately boarded a bus for Ziling. We reached the city in the late afternoon, as the sun was setting behind tall buildings. I looked out the window. It was my first time to travel so far from home. I was amazed to see so many different buildings. Some seemed as tall as the mountains in my village. There were more vehicles in Ziling than my hometown had livestock. People swarmed on the roads and around buildings like ants in the summer. I couldn't recognize any Tibetans in the crowd. Everyone seemed Chinese to me.

The bus stopped at the bus station. I got off, quickly made my way to the window where bus tickets were sold, and asked for a ticket to Lhasa. They were sold out. I didn't know what to do. I sat down next to a column in the waiting room and considered my options.

After some time, a girl in a sleek black coat came over and said in Chinese, "Hello! Where are you going?" She seemed friendly and kind.

"I want to go to Lhasa, but the tickets have sold out," I replied.

She smiled and said, "I'm going to Lhasa. I'm just waiting for my friend to join me. We bought our tickets the day before yesterday."

"Great," I said, though I didn't feel great about it. I felt like she was gloating at my misfortune.

The girl then asked me in Chinese how to pronounce a few different words and have a simple conversation in Tibetan. I taught her a few bits and pieces of the language, introduced Lhasa and the Potala Palace, and described some other famous sites in Lhasa.

Time passed quickly. After it had been dark for some time, the girl left. I stayed in the ticket hall, and went back to pondering what to do. There weren't many people there in the hall – just me and a few old men. Some were smoking and chatting in Chinese. I couldn't understand most of what they were saying. I guess they were speaking their own dialect rather than the Chinese I had learnt at school.

After an hour or more had passed, I was still trying to come up with a solution to my predicament, when the Chinese girl in the sleek black coat reappeared. "My friend has been delayed and isn't going to arrive in time, so it looks like I'm left with an extra ticket. Do

you want it? Can I sell you her ticket?"

I looked at her carefully. I'd only just met her and was worried about her real motives. Was she a thief or a swindler? I gazed at her silently, trying to read her body language.

After a couple of seconds, I realized I had no way of knowing, so I asked, "How much is it?"

"Don't worry. I know you're a student. And since I'm a student too, I'll sell it to you cheaply. My friend paid 433 *yuan*, but you only need to give me 200. Is that OK?" she said.

I didn't even need to think about it for a second before fishing in my pocket and handing over the money. She gave me the ticket and said, "We're going to be on the same bus. Don't lose your ticket. I'll see you soon," and then she turned and left. I clutched the ticket tightly and thought about Lhasa.

Darkness deepened.

I walked outside and gazed at the bright, flashing lights of all colors that adorned buildings in every direction. Even the street lamps seemed brighter and more beautiful in comparison to my dusty hometown. After a while wandering around, I drifted back to the bus station.

A huge crowd was pouring out of the bus station. I pushed my way inside and looked around for the girl, but didn't see her anywhere. As the sea of unfamiliar faces swelled around me, I grew increasingly nervous, and continued scanning the crowd. Suddenly, a voice came from behind me, "What are you doing?"

I turned and saw the girl in the sleek black cloak pushing through the crowd. "The bus will leave soon. Get on now! Hurry!"

I followed her through the crowd and downstairs, and we boarded the bus to Lhasa together.

The bus was different from any I had ever been on before. Instead of seats, the bus was full of narrow bunk beds. There were three rows of beds across the bed, separated by two aisles. Each bed had its own number. Passengers crowded onto the bus, shuffling down the aisles, looking for their places. My bed was the top bunk, next to a window. The Chinese girl's bed was across the aisle to the left of mine, in the center of the bus.

"What's your name?" she asked as we settled into our beds.

"I'm Tashi," I replied.

"Many Tibetans are named Tashi. What does it mean?" she asked.

"It means something like 'lucky' or 'auspicious'," I explained, as we pulled out of the station. We continued chatting as the bus travelled through the night.

After spending the night on the bus, we stopped in a small town as the sun was rising. Most passengers got off the bus and had breakfast, but I didn't. I took my school bag from under my pillow, brought out some *tsampa*, and began eating it, sitting on my bunk bed with my legs dangling into the aisle.

When the passengers returned, the girl asked, "Why didn't you come and eat breakfast with us?"

"I ate here," I answered.

She smiled silently, reached into her backpack, pulled out a few pieces of fruit, and offered them to me.

"No thanks," I said.

She put them on my pillow and said, "We're both students, and we should help each other."

As the bus rumbled out onto the road, she rolled over in her bunk, turned to me, and said, "What should I say when I first meet a Tibetan?"

I explained how to offer greetings in Tibetan, and then she asked me how to say simple things like, "What's your name?" "How are you?" "I like it here." "How old are you?" and "Goodbye."

Most passengers on the bus seemed not to know each other. Very few talked to each other. However, gradually, the Chinese girl and I spoke to each other more and more as time went on.

Three days later, we reached Lhasa in the morning. She asked, "What are you going to do this afternoon? If you have time, come to the Potala Park with me. I'll wait for you there."

"OK," I replied. I was eager to see the Potala Palace, because I hadn't seen it from the bus as we drove through town. I found a motorcycle taxi outside the bus station and zoomed off to Sera Monastery. Although I didn't know anyone there, I thought, "There

are many Amdo monks there. I'm sure I can find someone to ask for help."

Sera is a bit far from Lhasa City. After about half an hour on the motorcycle, I reached the foot of the big mountain where the monastery is located. I asked the first monk I saw to help me find a monk from Amdo. I had some trouble explaining myself to him, because he couldn't understand my dialect very well, but he eventually got the idea, and led me to the quarters of a young monk who was studying a Buddhist scripture when we entered. He said to the young monk, "Hey! Kalzang! Some guy from Amdo is looking for you."

"Oh! Come in, please," Kalzang replied.

I sat silently while the two monks chatted in Lhasa dialect. I couldn't understand most of what they were saying. Every now and then, the Amdo monk asked me a question in our dialect, and then resumed talking to the other monk in Lhasa dialect. Eventually, they finished their conversation, and the monk who had brought me to the room said, slowly and loudly, "OK, I'll go study. You two chat."

Kalzang offered me bread and *tsampa* and asked kindly, "Where in Amdo are you from?"

"I'm from Trika County Town," I lied.

"Is this your first time in Lhasa?" he asked.

"Yes, my first time," I answered.

"Great! Rest today. I have a debate class in the Philosophy College this afternoon. I'll take you to the Potala Palace to worship tomorrow," he said.

I thought about it for a second, and decided not to worry about meeting the girl from the bus. "Sure," I said, and put my backpack in the corner of the room.

The next day, he took me to see the Potala, the Jokang, and some of the temples in Sera, and introduced the images and scriptures in each temple. The whole time we were visiting, a stranger followed us from a distance. I guessed he was probably a thief, looking for a chance to rob us.

We had dinner in a small restaurant near Sera Monastery before returning to Kalzang's room, where we drank hot water and

chatted about our visit to the different temples. After a while, I mentioned the strange man I had seen following us. "I guess he was a thief," I said.

"No, I don't think so. I guess he was..." said Kalzang, and then stopped.

"Well? Who was he?" I asked,

"I don't know," he answered nervously.

We both fell quiet, and our conversation ended in awkward silence.

The next day, I went into one of the temples in Sera to worship. As I stood in the courtyard, catching my breath after making prostrations, a monk approached and said, "Hey, boy! Where are you from? If you've finished worshipping here, you should move on." Flustered, I left the temple and walked back to Kalzang's quarters, where I spent the rest of the day.

Three days later, I decided to move to a small hotel in Lhasa City. I had hardly any money, so I had to choose a cheap, rundown place. I could barely afford enough food to fill my stomach. I needed a job, and quickly. I went to many restaurants and shops, looking for any kind of work, but nobody would hire me.

After three days of looking for work, I finally found a restaurant that would pay me three meals a day. It was better than nothing, so I took it.

After working there for two weeks, the boss sent me to buy some butter. I bought it and, as I was coming back, I saw a nice piece of turquoise for sale at a shop in the Barkor. I picked it up, looked at it carefully, and asked, "How much is it?" in rapid Amdo dialect.

The storekeeper asked, "What?" in confusion.

"You are from Amdo!" a girl on my right suddenly said, speaking to me in my own dialect.

"Yes. I'm from Amdo. You too?" I replied.

"Oh! Are you a student? Did you run away from home?" she asked without answering my first question.

"I'm from Amdo, but I'm not a student," I said

"Don't lie. I know you are a student and that you've run away from home. There are many students here in Lhasa who have run

away from home, just like you," she said with a smile.

I couldn't think of anything to say, so I responded, shyly, "Yes, I'm a student." I was confused. I wondered how she knew so much about me.

She was wearing a short white polyester shirt, had an expensive-looking MP3 player, and wore fashionable sunglasses. Her clothes were clean. She had a lovely voice and spoke the Amdo dialect perfectly. She was also beautiful, and seemed kind.

"Do you like this turquoise?" she asked kindly.

"No," I replied.

"Then why were you looking at it so closely?" she said, looking into my eyes.

I didn't say anything.

"Where do you work?" she asked.

"At a Tibetan restaurant," I replied.

"How much do they pay you each month?" she asked.

"I only get three meals a day," I answered.

"What! They don't pay you anything? How strange! Don't get stuck in a hopeless situation like that. It's not difficult to find work here, especially for a student like you who knows Chinese. You can easily make money. Perhaps I can help you find a job," she suggested.

"Thanks!" I said, taken aback by her generosity.

We chatted for a bit longer and then she gave me her cell phone number. "If you need help, call me any time. My name's Wangmo," she said.

I quickly returned to the restaurant and immediately noticed that the boss had a bloodshot, swollen left eye. "What happened?" I asked.

"I ran into a wall," she said awkwardly.

The next day while having lunch, my boss said to me, "Tonight, I need you to sleep in the restaurant."

"OK," I answered.

Two girls worked in the restaurant with me. They usually slept in the restaurant but, later that afternoon, they explained, "There's going to be a big celebration tonight, and we want to go, so you and the boss's brother will sleep here."

They went out a little while later, leaving me and the boss's younger brother alone together. He was drinking beer and seemed very unhappy. "Where did my sister go?" he angrily asked.

"I don't know," I answered.

"Why don't you know? You must know. Tell me! Where is my sister?" he demanded.

There was something odd about him and his tone of voice. I thought he might be mentally disturbed. I'd seen him around before, but had never spoken to him. I wasn't really sure about him. I said, "Your sister is at home. Do you want me to take you there?"

"Sure," he said, and suddenly seemed happy. He stood up, and we started to leave, but when we got to the door of the restaurant, we found that it was locked from the outside.

We tried with all our strength to open the door, but it wouldn't move an inch. The more we shook the door, the more enraged he became. At first he was angry at the door, then his sister, but eventually, he became angry with me.

Later, when we were sitting together on the cot where he usually slept in the back of the restaurant, he sipped from a cup of hot water and looked at me strangely. Suddenly, he said, "Poor boy, you only have one night left to live." He kept staring at me, but every now and then, his eyes would dart towards the head of his bed.

I didn't say anything.

After what seemed like an eternity, he stood up and went off to the bathroom.

I leaned over, pressed down on his pillow, and felt something hard underneath. I slowly lifted the pillow and saw a cleaver. I didn't know what to do. I put the pillow back and then, after thinking for a second, I lifted the pillow, grabbed the cleaver, and pushed it under his bed, up against the wall where he couldn't easily reach it. Then, I stood up and quickly went into the kitchen, where I found a small knife, and hid it in my pocket. Finally, I ran back to his cot and sat exactly where I had been sitting before.

He came back, sat down, picked up a bottle of beer, and smiled at me as he took a swig. It wasn't a nice smile. I was terrified, but I didn't want him to know that. Suddenly he yelled, "Where's my

cleaver? Where'd you put it?"

I stood up and backed away, keeping my eyes fixed on him. I didn't say anything. He lunged at me, and I jumped behind a table. He lunged again, and ended up chasing me around the restaurant.

After a minute, he caught me. We grappled with one another. At some point, he grabbed me by the throat and started squeezing. As I stared into his cold, bulging eyes, I could feel the air in my lungs running out. I couldn't take another breath. I thrust my hand into my pocket, grabbed the knife, and desperately stabbed it into his leg, again and again as he screamed and squeezed my neck more tightly. Then he grabbed my hand and twisted it, forcing me to drop the knife.

He lunged forward and picked up the knife, releasing me in the process. I ran over and got the cleaver from under his bed. He looked at me and said, "Poor boy, now I'm going to kill you."

"I'll kill you if you come near me!" I yelled.

I ran to the front door and threw myself against it with all of my strength. Luckily, it burst open, and I rolled out into the street. Many people were crowded outside the door. They were surprised when they saw the blood on my hands and clothes.

"Not me! Him!" I cried, pointing inside.

"What happened? Tell us!" someone shouted.

"He's a lunatic! He tried to kill me," I replied, still gasping for breath, looking over my shoulder to see if he was following me.

"We know. He's insane. Get out of here, quickly!" someone said worriedly. I turned and ran without looking back. When I got to my hotel, I called my boss and the two girls and told them I was never going back.

The next morning, I phoned Kalzang and asked him to help me. I told him I didn't want to work in that restaurant again, but I really needed some sort of job. He was unable to help me, because he had been ordered not to leave his monastery. Not knowing what else to do, I called Wangmo and told her my problems. She said, "OK, don't worry. I'll be there soon."

After she arrived, we talked about what I should do. She said, "Don't worry about finding a job. I have some friends here. I'll ask

around and see what I can do. I'm sure I can find someone to help you."

I thanked her and then she went to work.

She came at noon the next day and said, "One of my friends has a job at a hotel for you. You can begin work there starting tomorrow. Here's the address. Go there first thing tomorrow morning."

When I heard this news, I happily thanked her.

She smiled, and said, "You're welcome."

I moved to the hotel the next morning. There seemed little for me to do. I mostly hung around the hotel and helped out with odd jobs. I was free most of the time. The boss was kind and the workers were friendly. I couldn't stop thinking about Wangmo. In fact, I had fallen in love with her.

One day, the boss of the hotel called me. I thought he had something for me to do but, when I arrived, he gave me 500 RMB and said, "Go buy some new clothes. This money is not your salary. After a full month, I'll give you your salary!"

I thanked him and, as I was leaving, I looked at the money and thought, "Why did he give me this money? Perhaps because all my clothes are so old and dirty? Or perhaps because I'm Wangmo's friend?"

Not knowing where to go, I called Wangmo. After greeting her, I said, "I want to buy some clothes. Do you have time to help me?"

"Sure. I don't need to work today and I don't want to stay at home. Where are you now?" she asked.

"In front of the hotel," I said,

"OK. Stay there. I'll be there soon," she said sweetly, and arrived half an hour later. She took me to a market where I bought a T-shirt decorated with the eyes of the Buddha, a light brown Nepali jacket, and a pair of camouflage pants. When I put on the new clothes, she looked at me and said, "You're so handsome!"

I smiled shyly, but said nothing.

When it was suppertime, I invited her to a restaurant. While we were eating, she asked me about my work. I described my work at the hotel, and explained that the hotel boss was kind to me.

"Wonderful!" she said.

After we chatted a bit longer, she went to her place and I returned to the hotel.

We continued to meet almost every day over the next two weeks. One day, she called me early in the morning and said, "Can you come to my place?"

I asked my boss for permission, and he dismissed me with a wave of his hand. On the way to her place, I bought a bag of rice and some vegetables. When I arrived, she said, "Why did you buy such things? I have enough food here. You shouldn't waste your money."

"I didn't waste my money," I replied.

"You like rice, right? I'll cook rice and some vegetable dishes for lunch," she said

Later, while we were eating, she said, "I called you today because I was feeling down."

We talked for a long time and then walked to the Potala. Even though it took two hours to walk there and back, the time flew by.

We bought some milk just before we got back to her place. "Let me heat that up for you," I said once we were inside her room. I poured the milk into a pot, boiled it, poured it into a bowl, and gave it to her.

She sipped it and said, "It's delicious." I guessed she was just saying that to make me happy. The weather soon turned cold, as dark, low-hanging, clouds covered the sun. We sat on her sofa looking at the pictures in one of her photo albums. She'd been to many places. After a while, she cooked dinner on a small stove in a corner of her room. While we were eating, it began raining.

"I want to leave before the rain gets any heavier," I said.

"You should wait. You can go after the rain stops," she replied.

We then talked about her past and my past, as the room slowly became dimmer. The night deepened and the rain continued.

Wangmo said, "Don't go back to the hotel tonight. I'll talk to your boss tomorrow. Don't worry!"

It was now after ten p.m. I told Wangmo a love story, and then we chatted about trivial things. Next, she told me a story, and then I told her a ghost story.

It was very late when she went to bed. I lay on the sofa. She read a Chinese book, while I read a newspaper. I soon turned off the light, but was unable to sleep. I kept thinking about Wangmo. At around midnight she called to me and said, "That ghost story made me very afraid. I can't sleep. Can you come here 'til I fall sleep?"

"Are you sure that's OK?" I asked.

"Why not?" she answered.

I went to her bed and lay down. We chatted very quietly, as the drizzle continued. Eventually, we ran out of things to say, and fell quiet. We both lay there stiffly, and then slowly moved nearer and nearer to each other. Soon, her right hand was on my chest. She patted me gently. I put my right arm around her neck and planted a kiss on her forehead.

Everything stopped. Just her and me. Me and her. Her and her smile for me. Only the two of us. In that quiet room, on that rainy night, she and I spent our first evening as lovers.

The next morning, someone knocked on the door. I was still in a dream, and wondered who had come. When she opened the door, it was only the postman bringing a newspaper.

She cooked breakfast as I lay in bed. I looked at her and thought, "This is like a family – a wonderful family." I was happy and at ease. I was overwhelmed with feelings of love and happiness that I could not express. We spent a blissful morning together, and then I went to work.

A few days later, I managed to get away from work, and Wangmo and I left for a short vacation, visiting a few famous places outside Lhasa. We enjoyed two romantic weeks together. After we returned, I called my parents, asked how they were, and then returned to work in the hotel. That night, Wangmo called me, and we chatted about her work for about an hour.

A few days later, as I was walking along Barkor Street, someone suddenly grabbed my shoulder and called out, "I found you!"

I turned. It was my uncle. I was speechless.

"What are you doing here?" he said angrily.

I didn't say anything. I couldn't. My heart started racing and

my head began to swim. Before I could open my mouth to speak, I fainted onto the cold stone pavement.

When I woke up, I was lying on a bed in a hotel room. My parents were there, along with my uncle, and a monk from our hometown. Mother was weeping. Uncle glared at me and said, "We've spent nearly all our time in this room! It's so boring. We should be outside visiting temples and Lhasa City, but we don't know the way very well. Now that you're awake you can show us around, right?"

He was eager to visit places of interest, but the others didn't want to go anywhere. They were relieved just to see me again, and wanted to relax. I was unhappy and didn't say anything. I knew they would force me to return home, and then I would no longer be able to see Wangmo. I plodded around Lhasa, silently showing my uncle the sites.

Later, when we stopped for a short break, Uncle said, "Don't worry. You are young, and don't understand what you really want. You need to continue your schooling. Study hard. That's what's best for you."

I was sad and didn't know what to say, so I kept silent.

"Why are you so quiet?" Uncle asked.

I said nothing, as tears came from my eyes.

He said, "You have a girlfriend here, don't you?"

"Yes," I answered quietly. "I want to visit her now."

He looked at me quietly, and then finally said, "OK, let's go see her."

I took him to her place and told him to wait outside. I went inside and found her cooking. She smiled and said, "Sit down! I've almost finished making dinner. What would you like to drink?"

I couldn't bring myself to say anything. Tears dribbled from my eyes. She hugged me and asked, "What happened to you, dear?"

Slowly, I muttered, "I... have to go... back home. My parents... my parents came and found... found me today," I said.

"I knew this would happen, but I couldn't stop myself from falling in love with you," she said, as tears coursed unchecked down her cheeks.

"I love you, too. You're a good woman and have been so nice

to me. But, bad things happen..." I said.

"Yes, bad things happen, even to nice people," she said sadly.

I wiped away her tears and, just as I was about to say something, she hugged me tightly and sobbed loudly. It seemed she couldn't talk or breathe.

Finally, she wiped her tears away and said, "Don't be sad. Everything will be fine soon."

I wondered, "How can she be so kind to me? Why would she say that everything will be fine soon?"

We hugged again, and then she walked me to the door. It was very hard for me to say goodbye.

"Tashi, you must come now!" Uncle called from the street.

I didn't reply. Wangmo was very quiet.

I turned and walked away, choking back tears.

"Let's go," I said to Uncle. As we started to leave, a single tear fell from my right eye. Uncle saw that and stood in shock for a moment. Suddenly, he asked, "So, you really love her?"

"Yes," I answered.

"Can you live without her?" he asked seriously.

"I can't. We love each other," I replied sadly.

"If that's true, you can bring her back home with us. I'm not kidding," he said, quietly and kindly.

I looked at his face disbelievingly. I asked, "Are you sure?"

"Why not?" he answered.

"I'm afraid of my parents," I replied.

"Don't worry. I'll explain everything to them," he said.

I ran back to her room, but when I opened the door, the room was already empty. There was only a small, familiar piece of turquoise on the table.

NON-ENGLISH TERMS

Amdo, A mdo ཨ་མདོ།

Barkor, bar skor བར་སྐོར།

Jokang, jo khang རྫོག་ཁང་།

Kalzung, skal bzang ལྷ་ལ་བཟང་།

Lhasa, lha sa ལྷ་ས།

Nyima Gyamtsan, nyi ma rgyal mtshan ཉི་མ་རྒྱལ་མཚན།

Potala, po ta la པོ་ཏ་ལ།

RMB 人民币

Sera, se ra སེ་ར།

Tashi, bkra shis བརྟ་ཤིས།

Trika, khri ka ཁྲི་ཀ།

tsampa, rtsam pa ཅུམ་པ།

Wangmo, dbang mo དབང་མོ།

yuan 元

Ziling, zi ling ཟི་ལིང་།

UNDER THE SHADOW: A STORY

Huatse Gyal

All through my schooling in Amdo, I admired the 'selfless soldiers' in the many stories that we were taught – stories that originated in the Chinese Communist revolution, and were supposed to provide the foundation for our new society, since the 1950s. Our heroes were modest, self-sacrificing, and thought only of the greater good of those around them. Comrade Lei Feng¹ was one of those we admired most, especially in elementary school. At recess, the boys ran around with make-believe guns, pretending to be the exemplary and selfless soldiers we kept hearing about, willing to die because our country told us we should.

But there came a time when I remembered lessons I had learned even earlier, from the Tibetan folktales Grandmother had told me when I was a very young child. *Ri bong lo den* 'Wise Rabbit' was my favorite; he often used his wisdom to save weak animals from stronger ones. This story describes an incident that forced me to find my own voice, and that made me wish to become someone like Wise Rabbit.

•••

"Breakfast is ready Huale!" Mother said, calling me by my nickname. She then resumed chanting *Om mani padme hum*, the six-syllable Sanskrit mantra of Chenrezig 'Avalokiteśvara'. Along with Mother's gentle wake-up call, the soothing crackle of dried yak dung burning in our home's adobe stove, the whistle from the tea-filled kettle boiling,

¹ Lei Feng (1940-1962) is depicted as a selfless, modest soldier of the People's Liberation Army. These qualities, plus his devotion to Chairman Mao, led to him being vaunted as a model citizen through the post-Maoist years. A bit of a story I remember has Lei Feng eating lunch at his camp when he sees an elderly woman carrying a big load of wood. Lei Feng immediately goes to help her carry the load, and even happily offers her his lunch. Lei Feng's picture was hung up on the wall of classrooms, blazoned with the motto, '*Xiang Lei Feng xuexi* Learn From Lei Feng'.

Huatse Gyal. 2014. Under the Shadow. *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 35:143-158.

and the fragrant smell of juniper incense (burned to purify the house) woke me up.

Every day, like all Tibetan mothers in my hometown, my mother wakes up at the crack of dawn to prepare breakfast, and makes offerings to the mountain deities on the family's offering altar, which is located right behind my family's adobe house. First, she places some smoldering yak dung on the offering platform. She then places three spoons of roasted barley flour mixed with butter on the fire. After that, she pours a few drops of milk tea on top of it, and then uses the ladle to make the libations in the direction of the mountains, where the village's protective deities reside. Finally, she prays to the mountain deities – eyes closed, palms held together with fervent devotion – beseeching them to bring good health, prosperity, and safety for my family and for all sentient beings. After making offerings to protect the family, Mother then starts preparing breakfast before she wakes everyone up.

I stretched and yawned. Mother turned to me and said, "Hua le, it's snowing heavily outside. You probably can't go to school today," before adding more yak dung and wood to the stove. The yak dung and wood started burning immediately. The flame inside the stove grew bigger and bigger and the sputtering of the fire increased, as large yellow flames rushed into the chimney hole, as if the flames were deliberately avoiding the center of the teapot.

"It's going to be very snowy and windy, Hua le. Do you have to go to school today?" Father asked while still lying in bed, wrapped in his blanket to avoid the icy wind coming through the open spaces around the window frame.

"Yes, I have to go today. My class teacher has recently started taking student attendance very seriously. I am also the class vice-monitor, so I have to be at school on time," I said, while looking for some warm clothes. I began worrying about returning late to my senior middle school, where I boarded, after winter break.

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Typically, each class has a teacher who is in charge of checking sanitation and organizing student work. They are addressed as *ban zhuren* in Chinese and *dzin dak* in Tibetan. Just as each county town or prefecture government has a principle leader and a vice-leader, each school has a principle headmaster and vice-headmaster, and each class typically has a *zong banzhang* 'principle monitor' and a *fu banzhang* 'vice-monitor'. This centralized hierarchy extends right from the principle all the way down to each dorm room. Each level has the right to punish the one below them, but is also responsible for their conduct, and can be expected to be punished by those above them. I was the vice-monitor of my senior middle school class. It is a mark of honor and respect, and all students in positions like these are expected to be just like Lei Feng – models of exemplary behavior and performance at all times.

Our major responsibilities as class monitors were taking attendance, collecting class fees from students and, most importantly, conducting 'sanitary inspections' of students' dormitory rooms, including the girls' rooms, under the jurisdiction of our class teacher. We would conduct these inspections almost every night at around ten o'clock, alongside schoolteachers and other staff, including our class teacher, Tshe ring. The results of the 'sanitary inspection' were publicly announced each week in front of all the students on the school's soccer field where we also did daily morning exercises. Two rooms, one boys' and one girls', in the dormitory were selected as the best rooms of the week and were awarded a new hand towel, a bag of detergent, and a red flag.

I shared Room 111 with the principle monitor and four other boys. Ironically, despite being the inspectors, our room was only chosen once as 'exemplary'. Room 302 was a girls' room; they frequently were rewarded for keeping their room clean and tidy. Many of our classmates made fun of us by referring to us as 'the two hypocritical class monitors'. Frankly, we cared neither about the inspection nor the awards. We just followed our class teacher and enjoyed inspecting the girls' rooms because they offered us hot water

during our inspections, as a gesture of hospitality, and we, or at least I, thought it was cool to walk with the class teacher to inspect the girls' rooms, because the very act of walking with teachers also gave us a sense of authority and power.

...

"Hua le, if you have to go, then you had better get ready soon before the weather gets even worse in the afternoon. I made some offerings to the mountain deities early this morning, and I will also make more offerings now and later today. Hopefully, the snow will stop and the sky will soon clear," Mother said, bringing me some pants and a warm-looking pair of old sports shoes.

"Sure Mother, it will be fine," I said worriedly.

"I'll check the weather outside. It's dangerous to ride a motorcycle to the county seat in this weather," Father said. He stood up, putting on his sheepskin robe. Clearing his throat, he opened the door and went outside. As he went into the courtyard, the squeaky, crunchy sound of snow under his boots came in with a wintry gust of air. The sound was clear and deep, and then it gradually faded as he walked a dozen steps further, until only his footprints were visible in the snow.

Father usually gave me a ride to the county seat on his motorcycle, and from there I would take a public bus for about two hours to my school in a nearby county. We had to go through hundreds of zigzags and steep slopes on the mountains to reach the county seat from my village. Since my family lived far from school, I usually only went home one or twice each semester.

...

"You'll freeze in this weather. Wait 'til the snow stops," Father said when he returned, using a towel to wipe the snow off his head.

"If I wait too long, I will miss the bus at the county town," I replied, concerned about the consequences of returning late to school. I began to worry. "Would I be commanded to stand and be beaten in front of the class? Would I be asked to clean the classroom for a week? Would I, would I, would I...?"

"Tell your teacher there was too much snow," Father said.

"Father, he won't listen," I argued, hopelessly.

So I waited and waited in the house while my parents went to give some fodder to our sheep and yaks. Mother came back and said, "Two lambs have frozen to death. There is no way you can go to school in this weather."

"I have to make it to school today, Mother," I replied, beginning to panic.

It snowed almost all day. The next day was even worse, with a very sharp wind that blew snow in the air.

So, just like that, I had to wait at home for three days. I was nervous because I was afraid of being punished and embarrassed in front of the whole school. Such things had happened to other students before. I felt if there were one magical thing that I could do in my life, I would stop the snow at all costs. Almost every half hour, I went outside and checked the weather. Every time I saw a clear spot in the sky, I would run back to the house and inform my parents about the weather, because they were also very concerned about me returning late to school. Then, when I saw the clear spots in the sky give way to dark clouds rising up from the mountains in the west, I was deeply downhearted. During three days of waiting for the sun, my hope was probably killed more than a hundred times.

Finally, there was some sun!

My father took me to the county seat on his motorcycle. The road from my village to the county seat was covered in snow; some sections were still frozen. Along the way we fell at least three times. Fortunately, we were not seriously hurt, although passing cars, trucks, and motorcycles spattered our shoes and pants with mud.

•••

I arrived at school just in time to see the Tibetan headmaster's fancy Hongqi 'Red Flag' brand car coming through the school's rusty metal gate. My buddies from Room 111 nicknamed him Xiaozhang ken khyok – Principal Crooked-neck. Schoolteachers, school administrators, and staff feared him, including my class teacher, Tshe ring. Our school headmaster never smiled. He ruled the school like it was his own personal fiefdom, by insisting that only the vice headmaster

had the right to report school issues to him. He used fear and intimidation to run the school. He had surveillance cameras installed in classrooms, dormitory hallways, and above the school gate. When he saw students loitering in the classroom through the surveillance camera on his computer, he would call the teacher responsible for that class and roar, "Control your students or lose your job!" Then the class teacher would angrily run from his office to the classroom, and coerce students to behave by scolding or beating them.

It was lunchtime. The schoolteachers were coming out of the school gate one after another. There were groups of students coming out to buy some snacks. Those who could afford it were rushing into a well-known meat dumpling restaurant right outside the school.

To avoid the possibility of being scolded in front of everyone, I did not enter through the gate, but climbed over a crumbling school wall behind the school buildings. I headed straight for my dormitory.

My plan utterly failed. As I approached my dorm, Teacher Tshe ring, a short, stout man who usually wore a gold-colored suit and combed his thick hair up onto his head, came towards me. I tried to avoid him, but he called out to me.

"Hi, come here!" he exclaimed.

I approached him, hoping the girl I was dating was not nearby. But when I saw some of her friends coming towards us in the distance, my heart pounded and my face started burning. *What can you do when class points, awards, rankings, and red flags are the only measure of your worth?* I was very angry and felt hopeless. I was not really thinking of 'human dignity' at the time, but I was very angry and felt hopeless.

"Why on earth have you come to school so late!? Do you have any idea how many points our class has lost because of your absence!? Do you think you can come whenever you want to!? This is a school, not a free marketplace!² Don't you know that!? Don't you

² Free marketplace '*ziyou shichang*' alludes to the winding streets in the town, where pool halls and Internet cafes are located. Teacher Tshe ring was suggesting that a free marketplace is unruly and one can come and go there as one pleases, but school is different.

know you are the class's vice monitor!? You should be a role model for the class!" the class teacher yelled, without giving me a chance to explain. Students stared at me as I stared at my shoes, feeling trapped, like a small rabbit standing in front of a giant tiger.

After his long speech, I said under my breath, "I am sorry. It snowed heavily in my home place, so I couldn't come to school on time."

"It snowed in other places as well! How come students from other places could still come to school even if there was snow?" he shouted.

He totally ignored my explanation. I was thinking that he at least should have known that when snow falls throughout a big region, it snows more in some areas and less in others. But trying to reason with him was, as a Tibetan proverb says *chang ki na nang la chö shé go ni dra mo ré* 'Like teaching the Dharma in the ears of wolves'. So I kept my mouth shut.

He continued, "Today is Sunday. We are going to have our weekly class meeting tonight. At the meeting, you must read a letter of self-criticism, apologize to the class, and promise you will never repeat this mistake again. Now Get out of here!"

•••

I went straight to my dorm, feeling humiliated. Worse yet, I was very embarrassed that he had created such a scene in front of my girlfriend's friends, who would surely report everything to her.

When I got to my room, at least my dorm room buddies greeted me warmly.

"How come you came a few days late?"

"Did something happen to your family?"

"Our class teacher was very angry about your absence, but it should be fine. Don't worry."

Still stinging from the harsh encounter with the class teacher, I simply said, "There was just too much snow..."

I put my backpack on my bed and went to the classroom. I got similar questions from my other classmates, and I replied in the same way as I had replied to my dorm mates. I was not sure if my

classmates from towns could really understand when I said I couldn't come on time because of bad weather. Classmates from herding and farming areas definitely understood what I meant, or should have. Of course, my classmates did not expect me to apologize to the class for my absence, but our class teacher seriously thought that having such a ritual performance was very important.

...

At home, my parents chanted Om mani padme hum. At school, *our* mantra was the two-syllable word *gaokao* 'college entrance examination', and was the central topic of most discussions, conversations, meetings, and even classes. The phrase *mi tsé kyok tsam* 'life-changing event' or 'turning point in your life' was used constantly to heighten the importance of the *gaokao*, as if life would be perfect after enrolling in a good university. Many of my classmates were studying for the *gaokao* in the classroom when I entered. I took a piece of paper and a pen from my desk and started thinking about writing my self-criticism.

The basic structure of a letter of self-criticism is always the same: in the first of its three parts, you have to say what violations you committed. Second, you have to admit or recognize your violations. Third, you have to promise that *it* – whatever your violation was – will never happen again. I don't think there is a custom of writing a letter of self-criticism in Tibetan history, but it was commonly practiced during the Maoist years (1949-1976) in China. Basically, if your beliefs, thoughts, actions, or behaviors are deemed unhealthy or not in alignment with Party ideologies, you must undergo self-criticism, producing either written or verbal statements detailing how you have been ideologically mistaken.

...

I vividly recall the anger I felt as I brooded over the words of the class teacher and the embarrassing scene he had caused in front of so many students. I felt mistreated and humiliated. So, before putting even a single word on the paper, I decided *not* to write a letter of self-criticism. Instead, I wanted to take that opportunity to write about how unfair the class teacher had been to our class in general, and how

unreasonable he was in my case in particular. I honestly thought that if I did that, my classmates would support me. To my knowledge, nobody in my class genuinely liked him.

The more I thought about the situation, the more confident I became. I could not promise that I would never be late to school because no one can stop the snow. If someone had to write a letter of self-criticism, then it should have been the ruthless snow, which had not only prevented me from coming to school on time, but had also senselessly frozen two of my family's lambs to death! But there was hardly room to reason with a sentient human being, let alone with the senseless snow.

•••

I shared my ideas about speaking out against our class teacher with a few good friends, including the class's principle monitor, who himself was from a herding place. He was, unlike me, very good at finding subtle ways of handling internal classroom politics. Most of us liked and respected his well-honed ideas and calm personality. To my relief, he was supportive and enthusiastic when I told him that I would neither write nor read a letter of self-criticism.

"Yes, don't write it. Our class teacher should understand that there was no way you could make it to school under such horrible weather conditions. *khyö kyi shok né ka lang lang yé* I will stand by your side like the pillar of a house'."

About an hour later, most of my classmates had heard that I would not read a letter of self-criticism. It didn't really matter much to them. They were all too busy and stressed about the *gaokao*, our 'life-changing event'.

•••

The weekly class meeting started at around seven p.m. every Sunday. As the hour drew near, I became nervous, but this did not weaken my resolve.

Silence prevailed in the classroom. Then our class teacher kicked open the wooden door, covered by a metal sheet, and strode into the classroom.

We courteously stood and chanted in one tone, "Greetings Teacher!"

He threw a book on the desk in the front of the classroom and flippantly said, " Sit, sit, sit."

Silently, he walked around the rows of desks. After several circuits he approached my desk and said, "You just came to school today?" as if he hadn't seen me earlier. I stood up, looking down at my desk, my heart in my throat.

"Huatse Gyal is our *banzhang*," he said, "and as a *banzhang*, he should know that he should be at school on time. But he was three days late. So at tonight's meeting, he is going to read a letter of self-criticism. Okay, read your letter to the class."

As I left my seat, he took mine, folded his arms across his chest, and sat stiffly upright. I went to the front of the class. Standing behind a tall wooden desk on a concrete stage, I leaned forward, putting my hands on the desk. This irked our teacher who bellowed, "Hey, get your hands off of the desk! Who, do you think you are – a lecturer with a PhD?"

At his command, I jumped and snatched my hands back up and started reading my 'letter of self-criticism.' I said, "You know I am from a herding village that is forty kilometers from the county seat. Unfortunately, it snowed a lot in my home area last week. It was impossible to travel to the county seat by any means. This is why I couldn't show up at school on time. I know I am supposed to read a letter of self-criticism here tonight, but I don't think..."

The teacher exploded from his chair, his face as red as fire. "Stop! Shut up! Who do you think you are?" he hollered.

At that moment, the class principle monitor stood up and said, "Teacher, we should let him say what he has to say." Our teacher stared at my friend for a moment, his eyes wide with shock. It was unheard of for a student to openly contradict a teacher in this way. Then, slowly, he drew in a deep breath and sat back down. The room was utterly silent.

If my heart had been a container where I had stored all the bitterness from waiting for days for a glimpse of sunshine at home,

falling off the motorbike on the icy road to town, enduring the blustery wind and coldness for about two hours, and going through the embarrassing scene he had caused in front of my classmates, that container was about to explode. Tears streamed down my cheeks as I continued, "Teacher, why do you never listen to your students? Do you think you're a good teacher? You teach us mathematics and all the people in this class were top students when they were in junior middle school. But why do you think nobody in this class has ever scored above thirty-five percent on math exams? If you are really concerned about this class, *that's* a real issue. Why is being late because of a snowstorm such a big deal to you?"

I had more to say, but I looked up to see our class teacher charging ferociously toward me, looking like a bull ready to trample a mouse. My friend, and some of the larger male students, threw themselves in his path to prevent him from reaching me. Of course, he was not easily stopped. He was throwing his fists in the air as if to beat me, fiercely pulling away from the male students who were trying to stop him, shouting, "You arrogant little boy, I am going to kick you out of this school. Get out of this school now!!"

"Okay, you can kick me out of this school any time. This is not the only school on earth. I'm going to leave tomorrow," I replied heedlessly. The whole classroom was a mess. Our class teacher was still shouting, as he was pulled outside by some male students.

•••

Fortunately, he didn't beat me, since my friends stopped him. He left the classroom. That night's 'meeting' was over, just like that. I went back to my seat. The whole classroom was deadly silent. Everybody's eyes were transfixed on their books. It seemed as if their bodies were glued to their desks. Fear haunted my mind. It was inconceivable to some of my classmates that I would be so 'rude' to our class teacher. Many, except for a few close friends, did not like my open confrontation, or at least I felt that way, as nobody talked to me on our way back to the dormitory. I also received some rather unwelcoming words and looks from my classmates in the following days and throughout the semester. As the famous contemporary

Tibetan comedian and writer Manla Kyabb said in his memoir, *Views on my Hair and Hairstyles* (*tra dang tra lö kor gyi sam zhik*):

It might be exaggerating to say that schools at that time were like weaponless armed forces, but most would agree that they were like training grounds. All the great teachers were *la ma* and their thoughts and words, whatever they were, had to be viewed as containers of gold.

This was written based on Manla Kyabb's own schooling experiences in the late 1970s and early 1980s, but his descriptions of his school environment back then very much spoke to my own schooling experiences as well. Now I neither blame my classmates, nor myself, I blame the authoritarian school environment.

...

Our class teacher summoned me to his office the next day. I thought he might beat me up once I arrived, but I went anyway. It would not have been the first time a teacher had beaten me. I knocked, and when he said, "Come in," he did not sound angry. I opened the door and went inside.

He said, "Sit there," pointing to a couch opposite his desk. I sat, and he continued. "So, it's good that you spoke out from the depth of your heart. That is a *tak sha ra zhik gi tak ré* 'sign of a good man', but you did not have to do it in front of the whole class. If you were dissatisfied with me as a teacher, you could have come to my office and shared your thoughts with me privately. Then, I would have really appreciated your thoughts. Why did you have to do it in front of the whole class? I heard that you were even talking to your friends about speaking out against me prior to our meeting."

I was totally shocked to hear this from him. I could see from his face that he was hurt by my open confrontation. There was a trace of humanity in his voice and words. I felt I was talking with someone who was constituted of flesh and feelings, not rules and rankings.

Afterwards, pondering his heartfelt words during our private meeting, I started to regret my abrupt words to him. I *had* made him look bad in front of the whole class, just as he had made me look bad

in front of the whole school. It seemed we were both hurt and embarrassed by such public denouncements. Deep in our hearts, we both wanted to be respected and treated humanely. Really, who doesn't? I believe that the problem was – and still is – that basic human dignity became buried under piles and piles of rules and rankings, rewards, and red flags.

•••

Looking back now, I don't think Teacher Tshe ring was a bad person. There were times when he invited students from distant areas, including me, to his home, and treated us to very nice meals during short school holidays when the students from the nearby town left for home. Sometimes we would insist that he sing a song for us during Sunday night meetings, and at our request, he would sing a relatively old Tibetan song that ends with a rap:

White flowers blossom on snow-capped mountains
My mind is as pure as the snow
Blue flowers blossom beside the riverbank
My mind is as clear as the river
Cha cha cha!

We would sing after him when he was rapping the *Cha cha cha* part and burst into laughter simultaneously.

Also one time, he was involved in a fight, and a drunkard knocked out four of his teeth. Our class went to see him in the hospital with some fruit and drinks. When we got there, we saw him surrounded by his mother, wife, and kids. He tried to sit up on his bed when he saw us, and greeted us warmly. He was delighted to see us. His mother, just like any wonderful and compassionate mother, seemed very anxious. She told us to follow school rules while her son was in the hospital. Of course, she also knew that her son would get in trouble if our class did something that went beyond the confinement of school rules. Before we left, our principle class monitor comforted the class teacher, "Take care. Don't worry about the class. I will take responsibility for them."

Teacher Tshe ring turned to his mother, and with tear-filled eyes, said, "This class has all the top students. It's a very good class."

Our class teacher was also under immense pressure to perform in certain ways: to become an exemplary teacher by submitting to school rules that are embedded in the Communist Party education system, both in the past, as well as in the present. After all, our class teacher and I were both under the shadow of an authoritative school environment in somewhat different and yet similar ways. It was different because he had more power as a teacher, but similar because we were both expected to act as role models (I as a *banzhang* and he as a *banzhuren*).

...

We had a math class the same day our class teacher summoned me to his office. The class bell rang, and our class teacher came in holding a box of chalk in one hand and a math textbook in the other. As usual, he placed the textbook on the desk and walked around the desk rows once. Then he went back to the concrete stage in front of the class, looked around, focused on me, and said, "Huatse Gyal, get out of my math class. You are a bad influence on other students, just like a rotten apple in a box of good apples."

I stood up, looked him calmly in the eye, and then sat down again. He considered me quietly for a moment, drew a deep breath, and addressed himself to the class, "Today I will teach..." and launched into the day's lesson.

...

The tension between my class teacher and me did not escalate, although he never again called on me to inspect the students' dormitories. At the end of senior high school, two students in each class in our grade were awarded honorary certificates for being exemplary role models. All the class monitors in our grade except for me received awards. At least, I felt relieved and happy to be able to graduate in 2007. A conflict with a teacher like the one I had had could have ruined all my chances.

While it is true that I failed to live up to the expectations of being a model student, I lost the kind of desire and trust that I had

had in elementary school – to become someone like Lei Feng. I had endured the trauma of the never-ending cycle of ritualized mistreatments and humiliations that often times turn both teachers and students into voiceless, senseless objects of rules and rankings, rewards and red flags. This was the moment in my life when I desired to become someone as thoughtful and capable as Wise Rabbit in the Tibetan folktales that Grandmother had once told me. I aspired to find an educational environment where basic human dignity and human feelings would be respected, and where particular views would be cherished and personal circumstances appreciated. Who wouldn't?

NON-ENGLISH TERMS

Amdo, A mdo ཨ་མདོ།

banzhang 班长

banzhuren 班主任

chang ki na nang la chö shé go ni dra mo ré, spyang ki'i rna nang la

chos bshad go ni 'dra mo red ལྷན་ཀི་འཛིན་མཚན་ལ་ཚོས་བཤད་གོ་ནི་འདྲ་མོ་རེད།

Chenrezig, Spyang ras gzigs ལྷན་རས་གཟིགས།

dzin dak, 'dzin bdag འཛིན་བདག

fu banzhang 副班长

gaokao 高考

Hongqi 红旗

Hua le, dpa' le དཔལ་ལེ།

Huatse Gyal, Dpa' brtse rgyal དཔལ་བཙུན་ལྷ།

ken khyok, ske 'khyog སྐེ་འཁྱོག

khyö kyi shok né ka lang lang yé, khyod kyi phyogs nas ka langs

langs byed ཁྱོད་ཀྱི་ཕྱགས་ནས་ཀ་ལངས་ལངས་བྱེད།

la ma, bla ma ལྷ་མ།

Lei Feng 雷锋

Manla Kyabb, Sman bla skyabs མལ་ལྷ་སྐལ་པ་སྐལ་
mi tsé kyok tsam, mi tshe'i dkyogs mtshams མི་ཚེ་དཀྱེགས་མཚམས།
Om mani padme hum, oM ma Ni pad+me hUM ཨོཾ་མ་ཎི་པདྨེ་ཧཱུྃ
Ri bong lo den, ri bong blo ldan རི་བོང་ལོ་དན་ རི་བོང་བློ་ལྷན།
tak sha ra zhik gi tak ré, stag sha ra zhig (zig) gi rtags red
ཐག་ཤ་ར་མཁི་གི་ཐག་རེ། ཐག་ཤ་ར་མཁི་(མཁི་)གི་རཏག་རེད།
tra dang tra lö kor gyi sam zhik, skra dang skra loi skor gyi bsam
ཐར་དང་ཐར་ལྷོ་ཀོར་གྱི་སམ་མཁི། སྐྱར་དང་སྐྱར་ལོ་སྐོར་གྱི་བསམ་གཞིགས།
Tshe ring, Tshe ring ཚེ་རིང་།
xiaozhang 校长
ziyou shichang 自由市场
zong banzhang 总班长

AN ABANDONED MOUNTAIN DEITY

Limusishiden

(Li Dechun 李得春, Qinghai University Attached Medical College)¹

INTRODUCTION²

Lasizi are cairns where mountain deities dwell, and the same word³ also refers to the deities that dwell in these cairns. There are many *lasizi* in Tu areas in Huzhu Tu Autonomous County, Haidong Municipality, Qinghai Province. The most famous are:

- Chileb, located in the north part of both Danma Town and Donggou Township
- Durizang, located in the northern part of Wushi Town
- Lawa, located atop a mountain on the border between Danma Town and Wushi Town. The mountain is referred to as Lawa Lasizi. Lawa Village is located at the foot of Lawa Lasizi's west side, which is within Danma Town territory. Tughuan Village is located at the foot of Lawa Lasizi's east side, which belongs is within Wushi Town jurisdiction.
- Sughua, located atop a mountain on the border between Danma Town and Dongshan Township. The mountain is locally known as Sughua Lasizi. Qighaan Dawa Village is located at the foot of Sughua Lasizi's west side, which is part of Dongshan Township. Sughua Village is located at the foot of Sughua Lasizi's east side, which is part of belongs Danma Town.
- Walighuan, located atop a mountain⁴ in Hongyazigou Township and Sunduu, located on the border between Songduo and Bazha (two autonomous Tibetan townships in Huzhu County) and Ledu Region.

¹ I thank AHP editors and Gabriela Samcewicz for editing assistance.

² Tibetan = *lab tse*. Mongghul do not use the the Mongolian term *oboo*.

³ Haidong Region became Haidong Municipality in 2013.

⁴ The term 'Walighuan Lasizi' is used to refer to this mountain.

On the first, eighth, and fifteenth days of the first and second lunar months, Mongghul visit a particular *lasizi* as indicated by their *purghan* 'deity' where they offer juniper branches and make prostrations in all directions.

There are, to my knowledge, no female mountain deities in Huzhu.

Lasizi are built atop mountains, at mountain passes, and (only rarely) in plain areas. *Lasizi* commonly feature a hollow square stone base rimmed by a low wooden railing. Many poles resembling arrows and spears are thrust into this base. Sacred cloth and sheep wool are strung from the *lasizi*, which are consecrated to Heaven and various deities, particularly mountain deities. Paper money and coins are placed as offerings among the poles and in the hollow base.

Most Mongghul youth worship *lasizi* but, they can say very little when asked to explain what a *lasizi* is and why people worship them by burning juniper branches and roasted highland barley flour, offering wooden poles, hanging sacred cloth from the poles, circumambulating, and prostrating.

Shge Tingere 'Great Heaven' or 'Great Sky' is also an important local concept. If Mongghul are suddenly confronted with difficulty, they often call for help from Shge Tingere. Burning juniper branches and making prostrations in the four directions atop a mountain or hill are believed to be especially efficacious because such a location is closer to Heaven. This explains why Mongghul are more concerned with Shge Tingere than mountain deities when they worship at a *lasizi* on a mountain peak. For example, Mughua Peak is located behind my natal home in Tughuan Village. Both men and women⁵ from Tughuan and nearby Pudang villages visit, burn juniper branches, and prostrate, worshipping all deities regardless of the presence of a *lasizi*. Worship at a *lasizi* is not only dedicated to a mountain deity - Heaven is the first focus.

Once a year from about 1984-1988, my father led my older brother and me to a mountain peak (4,200 meters) in the Chileb Mountains, where we worshipped at the area's most well-known

⁵ Women do not go to *lasizi* because of taboos surrounding menstruation.

lasizi on the first day of the first lunar month. We left at about three a.m., arrived at the foot of the Chileb Mountains at about nine a.m. as sunshine began shining from behind the peaks and mid-parts of the mountain range. We rested and then climbed until we reached our destination at about eleven a.m. After offering *szang*⁶ and piously making prostrations in the four directions, we descended the mountains and arrived home at about five p.m. in the late afternoon. A major motivation for this mountaintop visit was that my father wanted my brother and me to pass the university entrance examinations, which he felt would lead to official jobs and a secure life. It was also an activity, a place, and the time to better ensure that all endeavours would go well for our family in the coming year by beseeching Heaven and all the deities, and offering sacrifices.

People are unafraid of a *lasizi* if they go there to worship; however, they are apprehensive when passing by on ordinary occasions. It is believed that peoples' souls can be easily 'captured', which is evident by a person becoming ill. To avert this, people should shout, "*Lasizi garuu yarashiduu!* Elevating the pure mountain summit!" and a few stones collected from below the *lasizi*, should then be added to an ever-growing pile of rocks by the *lasizi*. This glorifies the *lasizi*, delighting the resident deity. Moving stones up to the *lasizi* means that good luck is bestowed by the *lasizi*.

There are no mountain deity *thanka*⁷ in monasteries in Huzhu Tu areas that Mongghul visit.

A *lasizi* is a sacred site. Consequently, urinating and defecating nearby are taboo. Removing stones, poles, trees, soil, and offerings is also forbidden. Those who remove such items are in danger of becoming ill. To illustrate this, I give the following two accounts. The first is related to a *lasizi* in Qanzua Village, Wushi Town. This *lasizi* is located at a mountain pass. It has no special name. Locals call it simply *Lasizi*.

⁶ Tibetan = *bsang*. Burning juniper branches and roasted highland barley flour for deities who, it is believed, consume the odor of burnt offerings.

⁷ Tibetan = *thang ga*, religious art generally of a Tibetan nature that may be painted, applied, or embroidered.

Account One

A pious local Mongghul family offered a goat to the *lasizi*. The head of the family led the goat to the *lasizi*, offered *szang*, made prostrations, and said, "Dear Lasizi, you are our protector. You watch over us. My family now offers a goat to you in gratitude." Thereafter, the goat was considered sacred and the property of the *lasizi*. It wandered on the mountains wherever it liked.

One night, three idle young men were in a village lane of Gumang Village, Wushi Town and noticed the sacred goat walking nearby. The three talked about it and then secretly killed, cooked, and ate the goat. A few days later, one of them suddenly fell unconscious. His family consulted the village deity and learned that he had slaughtered the sacred goat, which had infuriated the *lasizi* who had then caused the young man to become ill. His family then went to the *lasizi* and offered a new goat, and beseeched the *lasizi* by offering sacred cloth, burned a large amount of incense, and made many prostrations. After several such visits, the young man's condition improved, but his speech remained slurred and his left arm and leg were so weak that he needed a walking stick for the remainder of his life.

Account Two

In the 1960s, a woman from Huarin Village, Danma Town was returning to her husband's home after visiting her parents. She carried her toddler on her back and carried a basket with bread and other gifts her parents had given her. She hurried because the sun was rapidly setting. When she walked through a mountains pass where a *lasizi* was located, she had a very strong urge to urinate. Thinking she had already put some distance between herself and the *lasizi*, she urinated in a secluded place and then went on home.

Late that night, she suddenly screamed. Her family members were awakened and rushed to her bed. Her face was covered with sweat and she was speaking incoherently. Guessing that her condition might have some relationship with her recent journey, the family consulted their *purghan*. They then learned that she had been caught by a *lasizi*. When they asked the woman, they learned that she had urinated near the *lasizi*.

Early the next morning her family went to the *lasizi* where they tied sacred cloth and sheep wool, burned a large incense

offering, and prostrated. When they returned home the woman had returned to normal.

In 2014, increasing numbers of young Mongghul live most of the year in cities where they can find work. Equipped with mobile phones, they become distracted by modern technologies and have little regular contact with many Mongghul traditions. The following story reflects what was happening in the Huzhu Tu area in the early twenty-first century.

AN ABANDONED MOUNTAIN DEITY

Strong late-afternoon sunbeams glint through the pine trees, striking Nuri Lasizi,⁸ which sits on the shady side of a mountain. The mountains and valleys are quiet, except for the sound of wind-rustled grass clinging to the sides of the slopes, and the gentle whisper of pine branches softly brushing against each other.

I, the deity of Nuri Mountain, have just returned home from a long journey, which I had taken to try and dispel my recent sorrows. I dismount from my white horse, withdraw my long-handled sword from its scabbard, and sit on a clump of feathery grass. I pull my long pipe from my sash, fill the pipe bowl with tobacco from my tobacco bag, and start smoking. I look into the distance, searching for my home, Nuri Lasizi. It is not built atop a mountain, as most *lasizi* are. Instead, it sits on a ridge fifty meters from the mountaintop. It is rimmed by upper and lower wood railing. Red and yellow sacred cloth is wound around each side of the small, simple square *lasizi*. A three-meter long spear is thrust into the *lasizi*. Many shorter poles resembling arrows and spears surround that long spear. An altar for offering incense⁹ is in front. It is newly built after having been accidentally set on fire by a young villager in 2009. He had come to burn incense to inform me that he would soon marry. He burned juniper branches, prostrated, and then left quickly. However, the wind picked up, fanning the smoldering offerings into bright flickering flames that burned the *lasizi* frame, reducing it to nothing but a big pile of ash.

I was angry, but I didn't punish the young man because his mistake was not intentional. Three days later, the young man's family invited three monks from Rgulang Monastery¹⁰ to chant for three days by the *lasizi*. The family later rebuilt the *lasizi*, which delighted me. They even used fragrant, high quality pinewood in building the *lasizi*,

⁸ Nuri (Jijialing) Village is located on the southern border of today's Dongshan Township, Huzhu Tu Autonomous County. *Nuri* means 'ridge' in Mongghul.

⁹ Nuri Mountain Deity enjoys liquor. Local Chinese devotees offer Nuri Mountain Deity roosters, which many Mongghul never do.

¹⁰ Youning, Dgon lung dgon pa.

which made me even happier. The new *lasizi* was smaller than the older version. The many poles resembling arrows and spears that had been thrust into the altar had all been burned by the fire. This had been the largest and most well-known *lasizi* in Naringhuali Valley.¹¹

Several green pine trees grow at the *lasizi*'s southwest side. They are so huge and thick that it takes two adult men to reach around them. Some forest workers investigated the age of these huge pines in about the year 2000, by inserting a metal probe in one of the thick trees, removing a core, and counting the rings. To me, it seems like only yesterday, not half a millennium ago, that the trees were tiny seedlings.

Nuri Lasizi (16 June 2013, Limusishiden).



¹¹ Located in today's Dongshan Township in Huzhu County, the Mongghul population is more than seventy-five percent of the township's total population. It has the highest percentage of Mongghul of any township or town in the county.

Nuri Lasizi (16 June 2013, Limusishiden).



I PROTECT MY FOLLOWERS

I don't know exactly how long I've lived on this mountain, but it's been at least five centuries. Long ago, the territory of the Seven Valleys¹² was formed in our Mongghul area. To further consolidate, strengthen, and demarcate the Seven Valleys region, the powerful deity, Baghari,¹³ from Rgulang Monastery, asked three monks to come to today's Nuri area to establish a *lasizi* to protect local Mongghul people and to demarcate his territory. With support from local Mongghul, Baghari Spear Deity began searching for a site for a

¹² 'Duluun Lunkuang' (literally: 'seven valleys' or 'seven jurisdictions') refers to the territory administered by Rgulang Lamasery before 1949. Residents within the territory are thought to all be Mongghul. Danma, Wushi, Donggou, Dongshan (Naringhuali), Weiyuan, and Dala (located in today's Ledu Region); and Xunrang Township (located in Datong Hui and Tu Autonomous County) are the seven valleys.

¹³ A well-known deity and rival of the Tibetan epic hero, King Gesar, Baghari is worshipped by Mongghul. It is strictly taboo for those who venerate Baghari (also known as King Foorigisigari) to sing Gesar songs and display his images inside or outside their homes and in temples. Rgulang Monastery houses Baghari in its Zankang (Btsan khang) 'spirit hall'.

new *lasizi*. A monk spirit medium,¹⁴ trailed by several other monks and a number of men and boys, climbed the slope with cypress twigs to the mountain top and then prostrated three times to Baghari in *purghan* form, who was held in the hands of another monk, standing close to the monk spirit medium. The spirit medium held a volume of Buddhist scripture, sat on the ground, closed his eyes, all the time chanting indistinctly, inviting Baghari to possess him. Suddenly, Baghari possessed him, and he rose to his feet. His head and upper body shook, and he grew increasingly agitated.

The local villagers knelt and one asked the medium where the exact site was for building a *lasizi*. The medium madly danced, working himself into a frenzy, while waving his volume of scripture and shouting. When standing on the southern ridge about fifty meters below the peak of Nuri Mountain, he suddenly bellowed, "The *lasizi's* location is here! The *lasizi's* location is here!" The villagers marked the site by driving a wooden stake into the ground at the medium's feet.

The exhausted medium gradually came out of trance, put down his volume of scriptures, and again prostrated three times to Baghari. The monks instructed the local villagers to dig a hole about one meter deep. After chanting, the monks produced a porcelain vase with colored threads tied around its neck. Filled with Buddhist scriptures, the vase was put in the hole. Wheat seed, peas, cypress twigs, butter, white oats, pieces of silk cloth, and small amounts of gold, silver, agate, and pearl were sprinkled around the vase. Then, the hole was filled. Villagers next built a wooden railing around where they had buried the vase. A male representative of each Nuri Village household offered a spear or sword, and tied sacred cloth to the new

¹⁴ A *hguriden* (T: *sku rten*) is a spirit medium for *purghan* (*pram*). A *purghan* is a deity represented in the form of a sedaned image or a cloth-covered pole held by four men or a man, respectively. The local Han term for *hguriden* is *fala*. The *hguriden* burns incense and prostrates to the *purghan* in the home of the family that invites him. The *purghan* then possesses him. While in trance, people ask questions and he responds. The *hguriden* does not remember what happened during the time he was in trance. He wears a red or green Chinese-style upper garment tied by two or three pieces of red or green cloth around his waist. *Hguriden* are able to identify evils while in trance.

lasizi.

Local villagers planted pine trees brought from the mountains of Rgulang Monastery around the *lasizi*. This mountain where they built a *lasizi* was thereafter considered a sacred site.

Afterwards, Baghari selected me from among hundreds of thousands of deities to be a guardian deity for the new Nuri *lasizi*. Baghari said to me, "You are the best candidate to be the deity of Nuri Lasizi. I trust you and feel lucky to choose you! The people here are all Mongghul. This place is located high in the mountains. Drought and hail are common, but you must prevent them from harming local people. Do not let them suffer from these disasters. Ensure that they have a safe, happy life by having good harvests, abundant livestock, prosperity, and peace."

"Nuri Village is located at the southern end of the Seven Valleys. Other ethnic groups live nearby. This *lasizi* marks the border between Mongghul people's territory, and that which belongs to others. Please help Mongghul people and ensure that they do not become absorbed into other ethnic groups. Do not allow others to move into and live in Mongghul villages! These are your duties!"

Since that time, I have been faithfully carrying out my mission. I know my position. I'm a mountain deity for Mongghul people here, and also for the Seven Valleys region. My *lasizi* was personally established by Baghari at the border between the lands of the Mongghul and other people.

Countless times have I successfully repelled hailstones and floods that would have struck crops and villagers in Nuri. Many times I have brought nourishing rain to Nuri when drought struck. Thus, I fulfilled my duties.

A Mongghul man from Nuri, named Changshuubog, was once herding horses in Xiaochanggou, which belongs to people who are not Mongghul. Several Xiaochanggou men came, beat him, and stole his long woolen bag. At that time, people were very poor, and that woolen bag was quite valuable. He cried out to me. I heard and immediately went there. I realized he had been beaten and robbed. I was angry and immediately caused one of the Xiaochanggou men to have such a bellyache that he rolled on the ground and fell into a deep

ravine. The other men pulled him out and took him to their village, where he continued to experience great pain. Later, they learned from a local *fashi* 'master of magic' that I had punished him. The man's father soon came to my *lasizi*, returned the woolen bag, sacrificed a rooster to me, and asked for forgiveness. I didn't agree and the ailing man later died.

Another time, a Chinese carpenter from Shuiwan Village came to build a house in Nuri. When he finished his work, he dug out a small pine tree from near my *lasizi* and took it to his home. Later that night, as he sat inside his home, he heard stones clattering on his roof. He climbed up there, but saw and heard nothing unusual. When he went back inside, he heard the same sound, which continued day and night. He consulted a local *fashi*, who said that I was making problems for him. He immediately remembered that he had taken a small pine tree from the Nuri *lasizi* area just before he returned from the village to his home. He and the *fashi* then came to the *lasizi* together, re-planted the pine tree at its former location, sacrificed a rooster to me, burned incense sticks, and kowtowed. I still didn't forgive him. I ensured that later he, and all his family members, died from diseases. I need to protect my property and my people as Baghari from Rgulang Monastery commanded.

Another time, in about 1953, more than twenty young local non-Mongghul men from Xiaochanggou came to my *lasizi* late at night to cut pine trees, so they could build a livestock compound in their village. I awoke, and saw those young men sitting among the pine trees, smoking and whispering. They were reluctant to steal pine trees from around the *lasizi* because that is my place and they knew that I am ferocious and powerful. I angrily summoned a strong black wind to blow through the forest from the west. The thieves were frightened and then truly believed that I was a living deity. They fled down the mountain and told others, spreading the news about me everywhere.

In the past, two very wealthy, arrogant outsiders – Huo Qilang and Zhao Balang – lived in Ganjiabu, which neighbors Nuri. They owned a lot of farmland and had many livestock. They did not believe in me. When Mongghul invited monks to Nuri *Lasizi* to chant

scriptures to praise me and make me happy, the two rich men lay on their house roof, facing the *lasizi*. When they saw Mongghul gathering there and busily engaged in rituals, they insulted them by puffing opium smoke in the direction of the *lasizi*. Their behavior enraged local Mongghul, who went to their village temple and told their village deity that they could no longer tolerate such bullies. Then they took the Baghari spear to Nuri Lasizi, carried it around the *lasizi* three times, and cursed the men to depart the area within three years. This was exactly what happened. Within three years, the two bullies moved away after their houses burned down and many of their livestock and some of their family members had died.

I ardently love my people, particularly boys. One summer day, a group of naked Nuri boys busily dug into some beehives in my *lasizi* to collect honey. The bees were disturbed, flew out, and stung the children, who beat the bees with their naked arms. Some boys fled, covering their heads with their arms as countless bees pursued them. I found this very entertaining and watched with interest as the boys and the bees fought. Then a village man came, shouted at the boys to stopping pestering the bees in the *lasizi*, and mercilessly drove them away. I was unhappy. Boys should enjoy their lives. If boys are happy, I am also happy. I summoned my dog¹⁵ and ordered it to take revenge. My dog raced off and killed the old man's grandson. Afterwards, I felt guilty about that.

I have never allowed women from Nuri to come to my *lasizi*.

NURI VILLAGE'S DRAMATIC TRANSFORMATION

Life in Nuri has changed considerably in the last two decades. Fewer and fewer Nuri residents stay in the village. The number of livestock has been greatly reduced. More and more fields are left untended. Few villagers come to the *lasizi* to burn juniper branches and venerate me. The whole area has become desolate. What's wrong? I decided to investigate. I left my palace, started off east of the *lasizi*,

¹⁵ Wolves are believed to be mountain deities' dogs.

walked down a steep path, and saw households built on high slopes near a big deep ravine, where three hamlets are located. I first visited Tanzi, where about twenty families live. I went to the first household on the village's upper side and saw uncovered water cisterns outside the household's courtyard gate. The cisterns were full of dry clods and green grass grew out of them. I realized the people in this house had been gone for a long time. The front gate was secured with a rusty old lock. I went over the courtyard wall and saw that the wood rooms surrounding the courtyard had collapsed. All the furniture was decayed. Weeds grew here and there. An overpowering stench made me leave quickly.

Locked front courtyard gates and weeds growing everywhere told me two other homes that I passed by were also abandoned. A house built against a hill had a half-open courtyard gate. I walked inside and saw a woman drawing water from a cistern located in a corner of the courtyard. She was using a long rope tied to a rubber container. A six- or seven-year-old boy was busy munching on a piece of bread that a lamb was also keenly interested in. The lamb walked near the boy, who threatened it by thrusting out his arm. The lamb ignored this and reached out with its mouth open. The boy ran away but the lamb chased him. The boy cried and asked his mother to help. His mother laughed until the lamb gave up and walked to its mother's side as the ewe chewed straw. I was delighted by this wonderful scene, and then left to visit another home, where only an old couple and their granddaughter lived.

The old woman was cooking over a fire of wheat straw. The old man was feeding swine with plants he had collected on the mountains. Their little granddaughter was intently watching TV. I guessed the old couple's son and daughter-in-law were doing seasonal work outside the village.

I left Tanzi and went to Shuulen Hamlet. There were only eight households there, and half of them were empty. The remaining ones were mostly inhabited by old people and young children.

I then went to Duuja Hamlet. I didn't enter all the homes. I just watched from atop a steep hill behind the hamlet. Rising smoke from the house kitchen chimneys told me supper was being cooked.

Nearly half of the households were vacant.

It was already dark when I reached the last hamlet in this valley – Kudila – which has thirty-two households. Seeing some lights in one home, I went there and entered their guest room where two old grannies were sitting on the sleeping platform. They leaned against folded quilts and sipped black tea. One was Sangjinsuu and the other was Jiransuu. Sangjinsuu said, "Please come have supper with me every night if you like. We can cook and eat together. You are alone in your home and I'm the same."

Jiransuu replied, "Good idea. Every night I feel very lonely after supper. I don't like watching TV. I don't know much Chinese, particularly the Chinese they speak on TV. I enjoy chatting with you."

Sangjinsuu continued, "I feel lonely every time my family members leave for seasonal work. During the daytime it's OK, because it's green outside, which makes me forget my loneliness."

Jiransuu said, "When I stay busy, I feel fine. When I have nothing to do, I feel very lonely."

"A number of young couples have moved away from here to live in Xining, the nearest big city. The remaining ones stay outside doing seasonal work for nearly the entire year. What will become of our Nuri if this continues?" lamented Sangjinsuu.

"Everyone will leave," replied Jiransuu with sadness. Have you heard that the government plans to relocate Nuri Village to the plain in Tangchuan Town, a local Han Chinese area? We will have to live with them."

Sangjinsuu said, "Someone told me that a new policy will force people living on mountains and in remote valleys to move to areas in the plains. Our village will move there a couple of years later."

Jiransuu protested, "I don't want to live there. I like our Nuri. Our people have been living here for centuries."

"Young people like to live down on the plains, because then it's easier for them to go out to earn money. That new site is near Xining City and Wei yuan Town, the seat of our Huzhu County. Transportation is convenient. All the homes have tap water, while we have to draw water from a well here. On the plains, people don't

worry about hailstorms, floods, and droughts, which are common here. People who live on the plains no longer depend on farming but, instead, work in factories and enterprises. They probably have an easier life there," Sangjinsuu explained.

"Yes, but what will happen to our temple and Nuri Lasizi if we move?" Jiransuu asked.

"People say that the government will allow us to build a new temple for our deity if we go to the plains, but I don't know about Nuri Lasizi!" Sangjinsuu said.

Jiransuu again protested, "We can't move it. I never heard of moving a *lasizi* to another place. Maybe it will just be left here."

Sangjinsuu agreed, "The *lasizi* should stay here forever. If it is gone, young people won't go honor him anymore after our generation leaves this world. We are old! That will be soon! What a pity! Ferocious, devoted Nuri Mountain Deity has protected us for countless years. Now his people mercilessly abandon him."

Jiransuu said, "I feel sad for my dear Nuri Mountain Deity."

Tears streaked the two elderly women's faces. For a long while they stopped talking, and wiped tears from their wrinkled faces.

My heart hurt. Brushing away my own tears with my sleeves, I left that household where I had heard such a heartbreaking conversation.

I returned to my *lasizi* and went to bed. Tossing and turning, I couldn't sleep. I got up early the next morning, and decided to visit some other hamlets. I went north to another deep valley. More than forty households live in Wachuang Hamlet, located on a steep southeast slope. I saw rising smoke from a household chimney, which was detached from other homes. Sure that people were living there, I went in through the front gate. Two chained dogs were barking in the courtyard. I also saw two rooms built on the south and east sides of the compound. A small rectangular garden plot was built in the courtyard center. Peonies and pomegranates blossomed colorfully. A pine tree grew at each corner of the garden plot. It was very clean in the courtyard and inside the rooms. A young man lay in bed, barely able to move his head. His mother, Limuxji, had to turn him over regularly, feed him, and clean him when he defecated and urinated.

He murmured, but no one understood what he said, except Limuxji, who could interpret some of his utterances.

When he was a baby, he had had a fever and was taken to a local, family-run clinic in Tangchuan Town. His future changed dramatically after being given an intravenous injection. He never got out of bed again. Limuxji stayed at home alone, caring for him. She also did farm work while her husband did seasonal work in Xining City. A younger son studied in Dongshan Town Middle School. The disabled son was the only thing that kept Limuxji in the village.

As I left Limuxji's home, I saw a woman weeding a field with a long-handled hoe. She was the only person weeding fields in all of Wachuang Valley.

Walking toward the entrance to Wachuang Valley, I saw an old granny in her eighties with a middle-aged woman. They were walking side by side out of Wachuang Village. The granny used a walking stick. The other woman had a bag that hung from her right shoulder. They were mother and daughter. The daughter had come to visit from another village. As they were walking along, the daughter said, "Mother, Nuri Village lanes are nearly empty now. I won't come to Nuri Village after you leave and go to Heaven."

The mother replied with sadness, "Few people now live in our village. Most have left. Village lanes are full of bumps and hollows, and overgrown with weeds, because few people and livestock walk along the lanes now. Nobody repairs the lanes."

"It was so nice in the past when I visited you. Many people were along the lanes, sitting, talking joyfully, and warmly greeting me!" the daughter remembered fondly.

The mother agreed, "Yes! How true!"

Then both fell silent for a long time.

I went to a front gate that was open in Dura Ayili Hamlet. I saw two rows of rooms inside the courtyard where a couple in their seventies lived. Other family members had moved to Xining City and now lived there permanently. The old couple had returned just ten days earlier from Xining, where they had spent more than a decade as gate guards at a state work unit. After they were fired because they were now too old, their only choice was to return to Nuri Village. The

neighboring houses had once belonged to their sons, but now the courtyards were empty. The sons had sold the wood in their rooms and furniture before leaving.

I left the old couple's home and went up a high slope. I saw Granny Lamuxji carrying a weed-filled basket on her back and holding a weeding trowel. Returning from weeding, she went to her home. I followed. Various colorful flowers were lushly blossoming in the garden plot in the courtyard center. Butterflies and bees flitted here and there. What a wonderful garden! A big black and brown dog was in a cage in a corner of the courtyard. An electric Tibetan Buddhist prayer wheel was turning constantly, emanating religious chants from the shrine room. The chanting, however, was in Chinese, not Tibetan.

Granny Lamuxji took a thermos and a bowl from her kitchen and sat in the upper courtyard, drinking tea and eating bread. After a bit she got up and fed her swine and dog.

I learned that she lived alone in that big home. Her two grandsons were absent elsewhere all year. Her daughter-in-law worked in Xining as a restaurant waitress. The daughter-in-law said that she wanted a life like most other village women. She assured her mother-in-law that she would only stay one year in Xining and then surely return to do farm and house work. Lamuxji's son was a village leader. His work in this position required little of his time. He stayed with his wife in Xining for most of the year.

I left Lamuxji's home and went to Caojiagou Hamlet, which has about twenty-two households. It is in the southernmost part of Nuri. I saw new buildings half-way up a steep hill. Hundreds of sheep were raised inside those buildings. Some villagers busily worked in the sheep rooms. I learned that some people in this hamlet had received government money to commercially raise sheep. It made me feel a little better to realize some of my people still lived here.

But overall, this tour of my area left me depressed. I returned to my *lasizi* and strolled among the pine trees. Only these trees were loyal to me. My beloved and once loyal followers had heartlessly betrayed me.

I sat on my bed, puffing a pipe, drinking liquor, and recalling

the changes. As I sadly sobbed, tears plopped onto my lap.

Wachuang Hamlet (16 June 2013, Limusishiden).



NURI VILLAGE

As I sat crying on my bed, I recollected life in the village in its heyday as a bustling, lively community. In spring, after the fifteenth day of the first lunar month, villagers would begin pounding hard chunks of manure with mallets in front of their courtyard gates. About two weeks later, the pulverized manure was loaded on donkeys, mules, and horses and transported to the fields. In the third month, the earth became soft and warm, and villagers then became busy plowing and seeding.

Once the crops were about an adult man's index finger tall, Nuri Village's most important festival, the *bog* ritual, was held on the eighteenth day of the fourth lunar month. This ritual is called Bangbang by local Han, a name that is derived from the sound of drums beaten during the ritual. *Bog* in Nuri Village is held in the village temple, on a mountain ridge in the village center. Villagers worship Nengneng

'Mother Goddess of Children', who invites all the deities and souls of dead villagers to the temple where a sumptuous banquet is held to entertain all the guests. *Bog*¹⁶ chant scriptures, sing, dance, joke, and burn incense to delight the divine guests. Villagers light incense and prostrate to the deities, hoping to ensure peace and prosperity for all villagers.

During the ritual, *bog* are assisted by the temple caretaker and *tiruuqi* 'green crop officers'.¹⁷ Historically, local villagers and guests from near and far came to the temple on horses and in horse-drawn carts. Participants lived in Nuri villagers' homes or camped outside. With pleasure, they watched the *bog* ritual performances, listened to local love songs, talked, and rested. They discussed *bog* ritual details and content, for example, the *fan* 'pole' at the courtyard of the temple, inviting the deities, the various rites for inviting, for example, Nengneng, the souls of deceased villagers, the rite of catching spirits, or the rite of scattering grain and eggs, and so on. Participants enjoyed all the *bog* practitioners' more than ten different dancing styles. They observed the rite of receiving the God of Five Roads and the taking down the pole ritual that signaled the end.

Huge crowds of people dressed in their best clothes, came to the Nuri area. Old people sat together relating stories about their youth. Meanwhile, young people circled together, singing love songs, drinking liquor, and looking for lovers. How nice it was! It was the happiest time in the year!

Before crops ripened, village women weeded the crops three times. A couple of women weeded in each field while singing love songs in Mongghul:

¹⁶ The ritual practitioners who perform in *bog* are called *bog* in Mongghul and *fashi* in Chinese. Only men may become *bog* and participate in *bog* rituals. *Bog* are intermediaries between deities, souls, spirits, and people. Apart from *bog* rituals, *bog* are invited to certain homes, tribes, and hamlets to perform healing rituals that most often involve exorcism of evil spirits. The role of *bog* is hereditary. If a *bog* has no sons, he chooses a successor among his brothers' sons. If a lineage does not produce a *bog*, then it is thought that disaster will befall them.

¹⁷ Men who ensure hailstones and floods do not damage crops during the time they are growing in the fields.

¹Shda Ghuaisangni purghanwa,

²Jala shdasa saina ju.

³Amduu ghajarini beeriwa,

⁴Yeri shdasa saina ju.

¹Buddhas in distant Tibet,

²It's good to worship them.

³Amdo area women,

⁴It's nice to marry them.

After singing, a woman from the opposite field followed:

¹Nukuari yerijin luanna,

²Mongghul kunni darilasanna.

³Nadiji xniilidiji soya ju,

⁴Nige sasiini xniidiwa.

¹Many people seeking lovers,

²Suggests Mongghul are prospering.

³We are joyful together,

⁴May all our lives be full of laughter.

Melodious and touching love songs resounded among the beautiful green hills and valleys for days. Sometimes, several love songs were sung simultaneously by different groups of women in different fields. The beautiful green mountain landscape was full of touching love songs. These energetic young people continued singing far into the night. Wonderful! Nuri villagers not only weeded, but also enjoyed their summer lives.

Early in the eighth month, crops ripened. It was the busiest time of year for villagers. Hail was common during this period. The villagers tried to finish their harvest as quickly as possible. Families with limited work-power worked overtime in the evening and into the night.

The harvested crops were lined up in rows of sheaves in fields, waiting to be moved to the threshing grounds near courtyard

gates. A half-month later after all the crops were harvested, villagers began making circular threshing grounds in front of their courtyard gates. They plowed the designated spot with plow animals, or used a shovel and then leveled and watered the soil. Once it dried, a stone roller were used to pack the earth. Villagers then used sickles to harvest the potato vines, which were later cooked. After this, the potatoes were dug up, dried in the sun, collected in the afternoon, taken home, stored in cellars inside or outside the courtyard, and later eaten by the family and livestock.

By the time each family had finished making their threshing ground, the weather had turned cold, particularly in the morning. Villagers began moving their crops to their threshing grounds with big, wooden-wheeled carts, or on the backs of donkeys, mules, or horses. Some people also carried sheaves on their shoulders from nearby fields. Some family members worked on the threshing ground, piling up the sheaves into tall, solid towers surrounding the threshing ground's perimeter to await the stone roller.

Once a family had moved all their sheaves to the threshing ground, they felt relieved because they no longer worried that their crops would be ruined by hailstones or livestock. They were proud the year's crops had been successfully moved to the threshing ground, and celebrated by first overturning big-wheeled carts. They then held the spokes of the freely turning upturned wheel. The bottom wheel was firmly fixed to the earth with stone rollers and ladders. Seeing this, other villagers would put down their tools on the threshing grounds and join them. They swung on the wheel joyfully until dusk. Some villagers and clan members were invited to the celebrating family's home where a sheep was offered to the deities in thanks for such a bumper harvest. After mutton was offered to the deity and Great Heaven, the family members came to my *lasizi* to inform me that they were happy with the year's bumper harvest, and offered me mutton and also burned juniper branches. The family and invited guests drank and ate. They sang a Mongghul song:

¹Tangdarihgiima, Tangdarihgiima,
²Mongghul hanni kuu xjunna,
³Mongghul dognangi dolaya,
⁴Mongghul kunni darisuuwa.

⁵Tangdarihgiima, Tangdarihgiima,
⁶Ghualini hgandini rjesa,
⁷Xra ulangi qolaja,
⁸Xra ulani tulighuindi,
⁹Halidan gergi pusighaja,
¹⁰Halidan gerni turani,
¹¹Zhinqan lama sojii ju.

¹Tangdarihgiima, Tangdarihgiima,
²Mongghul khan's descendants,
³Singing our own Mongghul songs,
⁴Mongghul people's custom.

⁵Tangdarihgiima, Tangdarihgiima,
⁶Looking deep in the valley,
⁷A yellow mountain is formed,
⁸On the yellow mountain top,
⁹A golden house is built,
¹⁰Inside the golden house,
¹¹Is a respected Living Buddha.

Melodious folksongs, the sounds of drinking games, talking, and joking blended together. The villagers worked and enjoyed their lives year after year.

Work on the threshing ground started after the crops were moved. At about the same time, villagers began threshing on their own threshing grounds. Sheaves were taken from the collected pile, untied, and scattered on the ground. The family's stone roller was then pulled by two horses or two mules circling the dry harvested grain stalks counterclockwise, filling valleys and the surrounding slopes with the sound of stones rolling and the sharp encouragements

of men urging their beasts of burden to walk faster.

After the stone roller turned for four or five hours, pitch-forks were used to separate the straw from the grain and chaff. The grain was winnowed, put in bags, and stored inside the homes.

Grain was ground in a mill, producing the first new flour of the year. Women steamed thirteen bread buns using the newly ground flour. All the family members, wearing their best clothes, would climb to the roof of their house where a big incense offering was made. They knelt as the family head held the thirteen rolls on a triangular wooden plate and intoned, "Dear Great Heaven and all deities, we safely made this year's bumper harvest with your protection and care. We thank you with the new ground flour!" Meanwhile, he threw bits of bread into the air in the four directions. All the family members prostrated three times to each of the four directions. The family head came to my *lasizi*, tied sheep wool, burned juniper, and prostrated to notify me that they had successfully finished their harvest work that year.

During the Lunar New Year, many weddings were held in Nuri Village. Some girls married and moved into their husbands' homes in other hamlets in the Nuri area. Others girls did not leave Nuri Village. All villagers, regardless of age, participated in weddings held in homes. All weddings were performed strictly according to traditional Mongghul custom. Villagers were spectators and participants who enjoyed the folksongs, dances, speeches, the wedding process, and the joyful atmosphere. This was also a place for younger villagers to learn what was said, sung, and danced. The mountains resounded with the rich sound of Mongghul wedding songs and it was also a time to seek sexual partners.

What excited me most took place on the second day of the first lunar month. On this day, village representatives would come to my *lasizi* to delight me. At least one man from each household came, all clad in Mongghul clothes. They first went to the Nuri Village Temple where they performed a ritual¹⁸ inside. When completed,

¹⁸ Tibetan = *rlung rta*. This ritual is held in a home with a *purghan*. Clan members gather during the second to eight days of the first lunar month, particularly on the third and eighth days. Participants bring twelve small

they went to the *lasizi* located 300 meters behind the temple. Here, before the *lasizi*, a big straw fire was made and a huge amount of incense was burned. All participants brought a bottle of liquor and sprinkled it on the *lasizi* altar. Each also brought a wooden arrow, spear, and tree branches, which were inserted into the *lasizi* altar. They tied sheep wool to the wooden frame of the *lasizi*. Everyone tossed *langshida*¹⁹ in the air shouting, "*Larijalu*²⁰ 'Victory to the Deities!'" to the sky to summon the mountain deities in the hope that they would ensure safety, fertility to humans and livestock, bumper harvests, fame, and good luck to all those assembled. Everyone prostrated three times to the *lasizi* and then circumambulated it three times in a clockwise direction.

Villagers didn't leave immediately. They would sit together in a circle close to the *lasizi*, drinking, joking, and singing drinking songs. Some young adults started wrestling until one was declared the champion. Some drunk men quarreled and fought each other, but I didn't care. I allowed them to do what they wanted as long as they were happy.

Village women would gather at the foot of the *lasizi* mountain, dressed in their beautiful clothes, admiring and envying each other's embroidered sashes, collars, and shoes. They enjoyed swinging on a rope tied between two big trees and swung singly or, sometimes two people together, face to face. Children chased each other among the women, enjoying themselves.

steamed buns and new red and yellow cloths, which are offered to the *purghan* early in the morning. Firecrackers and incense are lit, prostrations are made to the *purghan*, and participants ask the *purghan* about the welfare of the village and its households, livestock, and crops; and individual affairs for the coming year. The *purghan* generally communicates the need to visit certain *lasizi* peaks, for example, Chileb, Durizang, Lawa, and Sughua (Suobutan) in the Huzhu area, on such propitious dates as the eighth and fifteenth days during the first and second lunar months. At the *lasizi*, participants burned incense and kowtowed to all directions. The *purghan* might also have asked each family to chant scriptures in the village on a certain day during the New Year.

¹⁹ Rectangular pieces of paper printed with religious images.

²⁰ Tibetan = *lha rgyal lo*.

After I finished these recollections, I realized I had awakened from a wonderful dream, and then soon fell into a dark abyss of sorrow. I lay on my bed feeling like my heart was being punctured by a needle. All my past glory, my position, my faithful followers... I had been abandoned by those whom I dutifully protected for centuries! They had abandoned me!

I again cried mournfully, tears streaming from my grief-stricken face.

I VISIT XINING CITY

I decided to see what my former followers were doing in Xining City. I got up early the next morning and soon reached Xining, where I went down main streets and narrow lanes. As I went down one street, I saw many people coming and going. People were squeezed together on buses, while others were busily entering and exiting through a big gate. Many shops selling caterpillar fungus lined both sides of the street. A number of men wearing round white caps were there. I realized many Muslims lived there. Many Tibetans were selling caterpillar fungus in the shops. When a herdsman went into a shop, several Muslims buyers followed him to check his fungus and started bargaining.

I saw pushing and heard yelling. Suddenly, I saw a familiar person – Lamaxja – from Nuri Village. He wore an orange jacket and peaked cap. His face was dirty. He was pulling a metal cart full of garbage. His wife, Niidoxji, was dressed like Lamaxja. She followed behind the cart holding a shovel. They pulled the garbage cart to a corner of the street where a big rubbish bin sat. They moved all the garbage in the cart into the big rubbish bin.

"It's time for breakfast!" Niidoxji said.

"We've finally finished cleaning and carting the garbage this morning," Lamaxja responded tiredly.

The two pulled the empty cart into an extremely narrow lane between two high buildings. After walking about one hundred meters, they stopped on a corner where two low, simple rooms had been built.

To ensure some measure of privacy, the windows were covered with plastic. They put the cart aside and went inside their rooms. A room for sleeping had a bed of simple planks. Another room was a kitchen and had many empty bottles and a big pile of flattened paper boxes. The couple sold these recyclable items to supplement their monthly income of 2,000 RMB. They had black tea and bread for breakfast.

I learned that the couple had been in Xining for ten years, cleaning streets. They had two sons. One had worked in Xining as a restaurant cook. He met a girl from Sichuan Province, and eventually married her. The young couple then opened a small restaurant in Weiyuan Town, Huzhu County. Lamaxja and Niidoxji had bought an old apartment in Weiyuan Town with money earned from sweeping streets. They planned to work for several more years in Xining and then return to live in their apartment. They had sold their homes in Nuri Village before they left, and now had no plans to return to their natal homes. The other son studied in a middle school in Huzhu County, and visited his parents in Xining on the weekends.

Lamaxja and Niidoxji were accustomed to modern city life, though their living conditions were poor and their jobs were difficult and dirty. They swept an assigned amount of street three times a day. They started in the early morning when the street was empty, swept it again at noon, and once more in the evening when the street was busiest.

I left them and walked down the street. I suddenly saw two women sitting and talking on a roadside step. They wore orange, peaked caps and jackets. They were speaking Mongghul. Their brooms and long-handled plastic dustpans were next to them. They were resting from street cleaning. Warimasishiji was from Nuri Village. The other woman was from Fulaan Nara.²¹

"How wonderful today is!" Warimasishiji exclaimed.

"Yes, but summer is so short," the other woman replied.

"How many years have you been sweeping streets in Xining?"

²¹ Fulaan Nara includes today's Wushi Town and the townships of Hongyazigou and Songduo of Huzhu County and Dala Mongghul Township of Ledu Region, Haidong Municipality. Mongghul in Fulaan Nara use a unique dialect.

Warimasishiji asked.

"Two years. And you? How long have you been in Xining?" the other woman replied.

"Thirteen years. I've had this job for three years. Before that, I was a gate guard and I also worked in construction with my husband," Warimasishiji replied.

"You must have your own apartment here in Xining, right?" the woman asked.

"Yes. My husband and I bought an old, small apartment last year with what we had earned. I'm happy that we now have our own apartment," Warimasishiji said proudly.

"You're so lucky! I still rent a shabby room with my husband. Do you prefer to stay here or in your natal village?" the woman asked.

"I'm now accustomed to living in Xining where we will live for the remainder of our lives. Many families in my natal village have left and now live here. People there drink cistern water, transportation is poor, and drought and hailstorms are common. Here, everything is much better. Increasingly, men cannot find wives if they live in mountain areas like Nuri Village. Nowadays, girls refuse to live in poor mountain areas. My son is a cook. He married a Han girl. They met in a restaurant where they worked together. I'm lucky to be able to live here! My son and daughter-in-law dislike living in our natal village," Warimasishiji replied.

Warimasishiji's words shocked me. I sadly left.

I wandered down the street, as people walked quickly back and forth, thinking, "What are they so busy doing in these cities? Do they ever rest? Nuri villagers used to enjoy their lives after they finished their farm work." I went on and came to a big front gate. Huge, tall buildings loomed inside. A single-storied small room was built on the right side of the front gate. An old man came out from the small room to open the front gate for a vehicle so it could enter. I recognized the old man – Jaghuasirang from Nuri Village.

I thought, "Ah! He's here! I haven't seen him for so long. His wife died years ago. He has no son and was alone in his home after his two daughters married and moved to their husband's home. He then moved here to work as a gate guard. In the past, he often came

to my *lasizi* and offered me incense," I thought.

The car went inside. Jaghuasirang locked the gate and walked into his room. A simple single bed was on one side against a wall and a stove was near the room's door. Stovepipes connected to the stove passed through a hole in a wall to the outside. A table and chair were close to the window. He sat in the chair and frequently looked out. As cars came and went, day and night, he immediately got up to open and close the front gate. Although barely enough to live on, Jaghuasirang seemed satisfied, with his salary of less than 2,000 RMB a month.

I left and passed through a big intersection. Up above, highways passed over in four directions. Vehicles sped by. I felt hungry and went to a restaurant. The interior was splendidly decorated, had a wooden floor, and many colorful lights sent gentle illumination from the ceiling in all directions. Each dining table was separated from the next by beaded curtains. The people inside could hardly be seen from the outside. Gentle music played melodiously, which made me feel better and more comfortable. A woman cashier stood behind a counter, taking payment from a customer. She had short hair and spoke Mandarin.

A woman wearing a short orange skirt and holding a mobile phone came to the cashier and said in Mongghul, "Table seven's guests will soon leave. Please prepare their bill."

I was surprised to hear Mongghul spoken, and then realized that the two women, Layahua and Zhinyajii, were from Nuri Village, which they had left years earlier. Layahua had married a man from Guangdong Province who had come to Xining to be a cook in a restaurant. They had a son and had sent him to the husband's parents' home in Guangdong Province. The couple continued working in Xining. The son was already five years old and spoke Cantonese. Layahua visited him once a year, but it was difficult for her to communicate with him.

Zhinyajii was younger than Layahua and unmarried. She had a Chinese boyfriend whom she planned to marry soon.

I sadly left the restaurant, and walked down a sidewalk along a big bustling street. I was disgusted by the city noises.

Suddenly, a big building appeared. Its front was lit by colorful glittering lights. I was dumbfounded, and decided to go in and see what was going on. I entered through a narrow front gate. An elevator took me into a big dark room where purple lighting relaxed me. There was a huge leather sofa in the middle of the room with a table and small chairs around it. It was a KTV room. Many small private rooms were curtained off. People sat inside drinking beer, liquor, green tea, coffee, Sprite, and Coke, and eating grilled chicken legs, popcorn, sunflower seeds, dry fruits, nuts, various smoked meats and fish, and spicy pickles. They sang and joked and seemed to be having fun. There was a huge TV screen on the wall of each of the private rooms. People selected songs and waited their turn to sing, or sang together in Chinese.

I was enjoying the songs and comfortable rooms when suddenly a familiar figure caught my eye. I realized it was Layansuu, also from Nuri Village. Her hair was cut short and dyed red. Her face was made up and flushed from drinking. She wore a thin sleeveless undergarment that exposed her midriff, a short skirt, and stiletto heels. She was eating, drinking, dancing, and singing. Layansuu was no longer a Mongghul woman with two long braids, who wore Mongghul clothes, farmed, embroidered, and cared for children.

My thoughts in turmoil, I decided to return to Nuri Lasizi without delay.

I RETURN HOME

En route to Nuri, I thought a lot. I understood why my followers had moved to Xining and other faraway areas. Work in the Nuri area is primarily agricultural. Nuri Valley residents live on slopes and it is only possible to transport goods by livestock. On rainy and snowy days, transportation stops until paths dry. Trucks and cars have great difficulty reaching the hamlets because of the narrowness and steep turns of the tracks. Hailstorms and drought are common. Access to drinking water is another big problem.

Hoping to gain a higher standard of living, locals leave for

what they believe will be more rewarding work. There are many more job opportunities in Xining. They want to have new experiences, have more opportunities, and meet different people in the cities. Young men find women to marry and then stay permanently in the city. Meanwhile, girls from rural mountain areas marry and live with their husbands in plain areas or cities. Understandably, the girls don't want to live in remote rural areas.

The policy of building a new socialist countryside means that Nuri Village will move to a plain area at the foot of a mountain in Tangchuan Town in a couple of years. Villagers have decided to build a new temple in the new area. The village deity will be moved there. Nuri Lasizi will be left on Nuri Mountain. At that time, having lost my followers, I will surely have nothing to do.

...

I returned to my home at the *lasizi*, wearily lay down, and recalled the successive incarnations of Tughuan Living Buddha who had visited me and the people of Nuri. During their visits, each of the Tughuan Living Buddhas said to me, "Please take good care of the Nuri area. Your task is very important for our Mongghul area, for the Seven Valleys, and for Rgulang Monastery. The Nuri area is an excellent place with much farmland."

I thought, "I certainly have done my duty, but everything has vanished."

...

Several years passed. All the Nuri people had moved to live in the Tangchuan Town plain area. They had taken everything in the village temple including the deity. Afterwards, some villagers visited Nuri Lasizi just once or twice a year. I remained, waiting for my followers.

...

Three decades later, fewer and fewer of my once-devout followers came to visit. I looked forward to their rare visits. Wild grass and wild animals had become masters of the land.

...

Fifty years later, no one visited Nuri Lasizi. Many Nuri villagers had moved to Tangchuan Town and, to other places all over China. I occasionally visited the few I recognized in Xining, who almost never

spoke Mongghul and lived a modern lifestyle.

...

A century later, all the Nuri people had left the local area. They lived throughout China and even in foreign countries. I could not hear Mongghul spoken, nor could I locate a single Nuri villager. They were lost, almost without a trace, having vanished into a much larger world.

NON-ENGLISH TERMS

B

Baghari (King Foorigisigari), a well-known deity worshipped by Mongghul. He is a rival of King Gesar (Ge sar rgyal po གེ་སར་རྒྱལ་པོ་).

Bangbang 梆梆, a name derived from the sound of drums beaten *bog*, a ritual featuring spirit mediums

Bazha 巴扎 Township

C

Changshuubog, a person's name

Chileb (Longwang shan 龙王山) Mountains

Caojiagou 曹家沟 Village, a place name

D

Dala 达拉, the name of a township and a valley in Ledu Region

Danma 丹麻 Town

Datong 大通 Hui and Mongghul (Tu) Autonomous County

Donggou 东沟 Township

Dongshan 东山 Township

Duluun Lunkuang, region

Dura Ayili Village

Durizang (Amiduoze shan 阿米多藏山), mountain range

Duuja Village

F

fan 幡, a pole

fashi 法师, master of magic

Fulaan Nara, an area that includes today's Wushi Town and the townships of Hongyazigou and Songduo of Huzhu County and Dala Mongghul Township of Ledu Region, Haidong City

G

Ganjiabu 甘家堡, a place name

ghualini hgandini rjesa, looking deep in the valley

Guangdong 广东 Province

Gumang, a village name

H

Haidong 海东 City, Qinghai Province

halidan gergi pusighaja, a golden house is built

halidan gerni turani, inside the golden house

Han 汉, a nationality in China

hguriden, a spirit medium for *purghan (pram)*

Hongyazigou 红崖子沟 Township

Huarin (Hualin 桦林) Village

Hui 回, an Islamic nationality in China

Huo Qilang 霍七郎, a person's name

Huzhu 互助 County

J

Jaghuasirang, a person's name

Jijialing 吉家岭 Village

Jiransuu, a person's name

K

Kudila Village

L

Lamaxja, a person's name

Lamuxji, a person's name

langshida (rlung rta རླུང་རྩ།, fengma 风马), wind horse

larjaluu (lha rgyal lo ལྷ་རྒྱལ་ལོ།) victory to the deities

lasizi, lab tse ལས་ཙོ། stone pile with pieces of wood resembling spears
and arrows stuck into the pile

Lawa 拉哇 Village

Layahua, a person's name

Layansuu, a person's name

Ledu 乐都 Region

Limusishiden (Li Dechun 李得春), a person's name

Limuxji, a person's name

M

Mongghul (Tuzu 土族), Monguor, Mangghuer

N

Naringhuali, a place name; today's Dongshan Township

Nengneng (Niangniang 娘娘), general term for female deities

Niidoxji, a person's name

Nuri, name of an area and a mountain

P

purghan, a deity represented in the form of a sedaned image held by
four men, or a cloth-covered pole held by a man

Q

Qanzua (Qianzuo 前座) Village

Qighaan Dawa (Baiyahe 白牙合) Village

Qinghai 青海 Province

Qinghai 青海 University Attached Medical College

R

Rgulang (Youningsi 佑宁寺; Dgon lung dgon pa དགོན་ལུང་དགོན་པ།), a
large Tibetan Buddhist monastery in Huzhu County

S

Sangjinsuu, a person's name

Shuiwan 水湾, a place name

Shuulen Village

Sichuan 四川 Province

Songduo 松多 Township

Sunduu, name of a *lasizi*

Sughua (Suobutan 索卜滩) Village

szang (*bsang* བསང་།), incense offering, fumigation ritual

T

tiruuqi, green crop officers

Tangchuan 塘川 Town

Tangdarihiima, name of a Mongghul folksong

Tanzi Village

thang ga ཐང་ག།, religious art generally of a Tibetan nature that may be painted, appliqued, or embroidered

Tu 土 Monguor, Mongghul, Mangghuer

Tughuan (Tuguan 土官) Village

W

Wachuang Village

Walighuan (Bagushan 巴古山) Village

Warimasishiji, a person's name

Weiyuan 威远 Town, the seat of Huzhu County

Wushi 五十 Town

X

Xiaochanggou 小长沟, a place name

Xining 西宁 City, the capital of Qinghai Province

Xunrang 逊让 Township, Datong Hui and Mongghul Autonomous County

Z

Zankang (Btsan khang), a spirit hall housing Baghari Deity in Rgulang Monastery

Zhao Balang 赵八郎, a person's name

Zhinyajii, a person's name

REVIEWS

REVIEW ESSAY: COMPARATIVE BORDERLANDS ACROSS DISCIPLINES AND ACROSS SOUTHEAST ASIA

William B Noseworthy (University of Wisconsin-Madison)

ABSTRACT

Early in the colonial period, many studies examining upland Southeast Asia focused on ethnography and ecology as a means for the colonial state to better understand the region's geography. This process resulted in the construction of physical, social, and intellectual boundaries that sought to maintain control of the colonial enterprise. The natural borderlands of the region defied such easy definition – the highlands, the plains at the edges of deltas, and heavily forested regions – became a fascination of colonial study. In the climate of pending Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) integration, which promises to begin the process of loosening restrictions for border crossing between Southeast Asian states by area residents, the study of borderlands has risen again. Because many of these border areas have pockets of highlands culture, continued study of the uplands is particularly relevant to deepening an understanding of the region. This review of several books on the Southeast Asian uplands explores historical and cultural strategies of individuals, particularly in Laos, Thailand, Vietnam, the Dayak community on the island of Borneo, and the Cham community in Vietnam and Cambodia, as well as some of the challenges that they face regarding 'the borderlands'. Putting these studies in conversation can help develop an interdisciplinary dialogue between scholars in Anthropology, Political Science, Linguistics, Ethnomusicology, and History, allowing for a more integrated international perspective.

KEYWORDS:

Cham, Dayak, Kammu, borderlands, interdisciplinary approaches

INTRODUCTION

This essay reviews: *At the Edges of States: Dynamics of State Formation in the Indonesian Borderlands* (Eilenberg 2012), *Along the Rivers of Central Kalimantan: Cultural Heritage of the Ngaju and Ot Danyum Dayak* (Klokke 2012), *Forests of Struggle: Moralities of Remembrance in Upland Cambodia* (Zucker 2013), *Bounding the Mekong: The Asian Development Bank, China and Thailand* (Glassman 2010), and *I Will Send my Song: Kammu Vocal Genres in the Singing of Kam Raw* (Lundstrom 2006). The most difficult aspect of bringing these diverse studies into conversation is the nature of the differing geographic spaces examined and methods used in each work. Nevertheless, certain themes, tropes, and foci illuminate links between them.¹

Lundstrom's (2006) study of upland Kammu (also: Khmu) vocal traditions from Laos is useful in highlighting humanistic approaches (ethnomusicology and oral history) that may be used to understand Southeast Asia's upland peoples. The focus on orality connects Lundstrom's studies with those of Eilendberg (2012), whose focus on the highland Dayaks of Borneo – thousands of kilometers away – along the border of Indonesia and Malaysia.

Klokke's (2012) work also focuses on the Dayak people, predominantly relying on black and white photographs, while

¹ Reviews of these books originally appeared in a series for newbooks.asia – a program run by the International Institute of Asian Studies from Leiden University. I recently partnered this program with the Center for Khmer Studies, leading to the broadening English language scholarly materials now available at the Center for Khmer Studies Fellows Library in Phnom Penh. This review has been substantially edited, updated, and extended with additional information from the author's current research while based in Cambodia (summer 2013 through winter 2013) and Vietnam (winter 2014 through spring 2014). I thank IIAS, the editors of *Asian Highlands Perspectives*, the Center for Khmer Studies, and the Department of History and Center for Southeast Asian Studies, University of Wisconsin-Madison for assistance.

including an essay on the Hindu-influenced Kaharingan religion.² Klokke and Eilendberg's works can thus be combined to provide a better understanding of Dayak populations in the uplands of Borneo. These studies of the Dayak may also be combined with Zucker's (2013) anthropological and historical study of the Cardamom Mountains of Cambodia to highlight the ways in which upland regions problematize the 'miracle' development schemes of both national leaders and international organizations throughout the region.

In a similarly critical vein, Glassman (2010) employs a political economy approach to critique the Asian Development Bank's approach to the Greater Mekong Sub-region, a region that includes Cambodia, lower Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, and parts of China. These are essentially the territories adjacent to the Mekong River and can be used to highlight issues surrounding the development of upland regions.

Finally, throughout this review, I relate elements from these studies to my own research on the Cham population of Southeast Asia. Although the Cham are a lowland people, they are transnational, being split between the neighboring states of Vietnam (~162,000) and Cambodia (~400,000-500,000), and hence face many of the challenges that transnational upland populations face. Certain elements of Cham tradition connect them to upland peoples throughout the region (Noseworthy 2013c; Noseworthy 2013b). These connections are not only through the entholinguistic connections that exist between the Cham and the five other Austronesian upland peoples (the Koho, Raglai, Churu, Rhade, and Jarai) of Cambodia and Vietnam, they are also evident in the parallels between the history and religion of many of these populations. To explore these issues further, it is helpful to review historical concepts of borders and boundaries in Southeast Asian history.

² According to Mahin, *kaharingan* means 'life' in the priestly language of the Dayak, as well as in the group's everyday language. It is also described as the 'primordial' or 'ancient' religion, as well as the 'religion of the ancestors' (Klokke 2012:33).

HISTORICAL CONCEPTS OF BOUNDARIES AND BORDERS

Dating back to the fourth century of the Common Era, it is possible to find notions of borders and boundaries between lowland Vietnamese and lowland Cham societies. At this time, the Võ Cạnh inscription appears, marking the use of and adaptation of Sanskrit in Southeast Asia. The project of 'state-making' and delineating space continued to shift conceptually, and writing became a marker of 'state-space'. First histories, such as the *Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thư*, the *Sejarah Melayu*, the *Jinakamali*, and *Preah Ko Preah Keo*³ recorded historical events and culturally important tropes with the rise of palm leaf manuscripts. 'History', at this time, included genealogies of kings and semi-historical legends. Examples of such literature can be found in the Malay *hikayat* and *syair* genres, as well as the Cham genres of *akayet*, *dalakal*, *ariya*, and *damnuy*. It is important to note that many of these records have been retained by scholars and state organizations across the region for the sake of research purposes. However, as Weber (2012) has noted, the retention of these materials among the lowland Cham, who subsequently became a group 'without a state', relied heavily on a performative oral tradition. Shine (2009) noted that literacy has been used as a symbolic cultural marker of ethnic boundaries used to distinguish the upland Raglai peoples and the lowland Cham. In this regard, Scott (2009:220-237) argued that orality gave texts greater pliability, malleability, and wider reach.

While *literacy* has been used popularly and in scholarship as a distinguishing characteristic between the uplands and the lowlands throughout Southeast Asia, it should be noted, as Thongchai (1994) has argued, that *geography*, or the establishment of a *geo-body*, became a critical element of state-making processes from the early to mid-twentieth century onward. Thongchai noted that this process was rooted in the nineteenth to twentieth centuries, when concepts of

³ David Chandler, a historian of Cambodia, has argued that this story of the capture of the Khmer capital of Longvek in 1594 was tied to a nineteenth century political context (Zucker 2013:145).

state-like geographic areas began to further drive a wedge between the lowlands and the highlands.

Concepts of geography in Southeast Asia have varied over the course of the twentieth century, and frequently relied upon highland/lowland dichotomies as well as constructions of identity and insider/outsider politics. Subsequently, political concerns have encouraged historical foci on the South China Sea and the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) (Glassman 2010). Meanwhile, there have been intellectual concerns, such as those highlighted in discussions on Zomia.

Finally, irredentism⁴ has been influential throughout Southeast Asian history, as seen in the development of state concepts such as the Thai-nationalist imaginings of *suvannabhumi* – *bhumiputera* policy in Malaysia, and being related to territorial disputes between Cambodia and Vietnam, and the ongoing dispute in the South China Sea (Biển Đông: 'Eastern Sea').

Irredentist movements' border disputes, and a post-WWII climate of American exceptionalism, have left scars across the region, in both highlands and lowlands. In Laos, the largest ethnic group makes up less than fifty percent of the population and the majority of the population lives on less than two US dollars a day. This legacy of crippling uneven colonial development, when coupled with the reality that Laos was the most thoroughly bombed territory in world history by the end of the Vietnam era, has made Laos one of the region's most important 'state-based' case studies for development. In Laos, Cambodia and the southern portions of the Annamite Chain along the border of Vietnam and Laos, illiteracy is mostly interpreted as a condition of poverty, as it is in predominantly lowland Cambodia. However, unlike Laos, Cambodia is generally considered a 'lowland' state with very little upland terrain (Killeen 2013)

In Cambodia, the Thai capture of Angkor in 1431/ 1432 was manipulated into visions of the DK Regime (Zucker 2013:145). The Khmer Rouge targeted every group that was not seen as 'Khmer'. If

⁴ Irredentism is "the doctrine... [that a space]...should be controlled by a country that is ethnically or historically related to it" (Baird 2010:167).

other groups assimilated into this politically, ideologically, and ethno-linguistically exclusive category, they hypothetically avoided persecution. As an aspect of Khmer Rouge policy, highlanders from the Cardamom Mountains region were targeted for their allegiance to the 'White Khmer' royalist forces of Prince Norodom Chantaraingsey (1924/ 26-1976), which emerged in the mid-1960s (Zucker 2013:41). By the 1970s, promotions within the local administrative hierarchy were used to encourage 'spying'. Buddhists as well as 'White Khmers' were marked for execution (Zucker 2013:41). Meanwhile, 'ancestor worship' was rooted out. The practice of building *phnom yong khmaoch* 'funerary towers for the ancestors' was a particular target, creating a border between the past and the present, as communication with the ancestors ceased. Eliminating ancestor worship directly resulted from a long-standing state policy that continued into the 1980s.

THE DAYAK AS A BORDERLAND PEOPLE

A similar narrative, although it appears to have deeper roots, can be found among the Dayak of Borneo. The history of the borderland and border construction on Borneo is equally tied to nineteenth and twentieth century colonial impositions. Early in the twentieth century, the forced resettlement of the Dayak by the Dutch turned the literal borderlands from 'untouched forests' to a vicious battleground. Border elites repositioned themselves as clients and brokers, while the colonial state made its own assertions. Seeking to enforce 'law and order', a 1904 treaty aimed at eliminating head-hunting targeted the Dayak, who were viewed as the major population engaged in the practice. This policy may be viewed as a first attempt to shape Dayak religion.

In 1945, the Indonesian state mandated that religious groups must adhere to the '*pancasila*' policy, which stipulated that, to be a recognized religious community, any belief system needed a holy book, a prophet, regular meetings, monotheistic practices, and

connections to a global community. Hence, the Dayak Kaharingan religion was classified as an *agama suku* 'spiritual grouping' or *adat* 'tradition', rather than a 'religion'. The *pancasila* policy effectively eliminated the Dayak from state-level discourse on religion, constructing a boundary of belief between the Dayak Kaharingan practitioners and the Sunni Muslim majority. This formal exclusion was coupled with attempts to 'pacify' the Dayaks through Indonesian support of medical trade missions.

In the 1950s and 1960s, the Indonesian military used food rations and medical supplies to 'court' the local Iban Dayak populations. Meanwhile, a young Dutchman, Dr. Klokke, observed that in the Ngaju Dayak territory of South Kalimantan (now Central Kalimantan) smallpox, malaria, dysentery, worms, and tuberculosis – all treatable medical conditions – were common. This meant that the medical missions could be easily viewed as successful, while they also acted as a mediating force in Dayak controlled areas.

In Borneo, the 1967 Basic Forestry Law No. 5 granted the Indonesian state authority over all forestland, regardless of local claims, even if small tracts of forest were controlled by Dayaks or Malays. This was a clear attempt to formalize the border between Indonesia and Malaysia. Consequently, contemporary Dayak are an international cross-border minority population, use two state languages, live in two time zones, use at least two currencies, and many elites have two houses. However, this circumstance will likely change, the result of a local economic depression due to the 2005 ban on logging (Eilenberg 2012). This population not only stretches across state borderlands, but also religious divides and local administrative divides.⁵

⁵ Mahin (2007) recently stated that the island of Borneo has Southeast Asia's largest population of Hindus besides the island of Bali. Hinduism is common among the Ngaju Dayak (900,000 total population across the Malay-Indonesian borderlands), as well as the Luangan, Ma'anyan, Tuman, and Sian Dayaks (Central Kalimantan), Merantus (South Kalimantan), the Tunjung and Benuaq (East Kalimantan), and the Ot (Oud) Danum (80,000, mostly in Kahayan and Kapuas (West Kalimantan). Furthermore, "thousands of Balinese transmigrants to Central Kalimantan" have

It is within the above contexts of colonialism, persecution, and land appropriation that peoples of the borderlands in Southeast Asia have continued to develop what Scott (1985) has dramatized as 'weapons of the weak'. The terms of Scott's argument can be extended to additional contemporary cases that have emerged after the publication of his initial study, as well as ethnic minority groups, with slight tweaking that acknowledges that one of the 'weapons of the weak' was a strategic move of playing with the process of state construction. In essence, strategic petitions seeking incorporation into the state on the part of certain members of the Ngaju Dayak community prevented the erasure of their community in the face of the larger construction of 'Indonesian' or 'Malaysian' identity. Meanwhile, borderlands, highlands, and other cross-border populations were frequently portrayed as 'fugitives' and violent outlaws, including in Scott's class-based analysis.

In cases of certain communities such as the Ngaju Dayak, the adaptation of the 'weapons of the weak' framework emphasizes the extensive intellectual and non-violent project of re-forming communal identity in a literal borderland. For many minority communities, a critical 'weapon of the weak' was contrary to what Scott would have suspected. Individuals used the formation of public institutions and the institutionalization of religious practice to secure continued survival in the face of incorporation and assimilation. In the process, religious elites emerged as dominant figures after sustained periods of discourse and impacted religious practices that explain their contemporary forms.

In the mid-nineteenth century, Iban Dayak leaders were predominantly rebels, although they played both sides of the colonial conflict. Meanwhile, in 1859 the Ngaju Dayak eliminated the practice of sacrificing slaves of the deceased's family during Tiwah ceremonial feasts, as a direct result of their incorporation into the colonial state and mediation of their religious practice with colonial expectations. Initial waves of Christian missionizing caused a decrease in ancestral

additionally moved to this area because it has been a hotspot for Hindu revivalism (Schiller 1996:412-413).

worship until the 1940s when the 'Japanization' of occupied territories in Southeast Asia encouraged a revival of animism.

The Christian Ngaju Dayak, Tjilik Riwut, converted back to animist practices and, in 1945, the Japanese urged him to give his movement a new name. He then chose 'Kaharingan' 'the religion of life' (Baier 2007:567). Just one year later, the Indonesian state formed the 'Department of Religion' (Indonesian [I]: *Departement Agama*) – which effectively barred 'Kaharingan' from being a 'religion' (I: *agama*). Instead, it was relegated to an *adat* 'movement of traditional practices' (Schiller 1996:410).

In adapting, Kaharingan religious leaders organized their first religious conference in 1950 and continued attempting to gain recognition as a 'religion.' However, the polytheist nature of Kaharingan prevented it from being recognized under the *pancasila* policy. This inspired a critical shift in Tjilik Riwut's philosophy. In a 1953 publication, likely drawing on his earlier Christian beliefs and perhaps merging them with Islamic influence, he reordered the family members of the Kaharingan deity 'Ranying Hatalla Langit'. They were demoted from godly status to the status of 'angels', while promoting the status of 'Ranying Hatalla Langit' to a senior deity in a further attempt to meet the *pancasila* policy. Further shifts in the relationship between the Kaharingan community and the state followed.

Further institutionalization of Kaharingan practices came with formation of religio-political organizations that aided their official recognition by Indonesian state officials. After decolonization in 1957, Tjilik Riwut became the first 'Indonesian' governor of Central Kalimantan. The Dayak community continued to form new relationships with state officials, eventually resulting in the foundation of the 'Union of Kaharingan Dayaks of Indonesia' (I: *Sarikat Kaharingan Dayak Indonesia*) (Baier 2007:567; Schiller 1996:412-413). A decade later, the Dayak further adapted, forming a 'work group' organization known as 'GOLKAR' (I: *golongan karya*) that worked with the 'New Order' regime (Schiller 1996:413). This organization afforded the Kaharingan community minor protection

in what was otherwise a disastrous period of Indonesian history. In the 1970s, the political climate continued to shift as the Dayak formed 'blood brother' relations with Indonesian state officials, hoping to ensure the continued benefits of minor protections (Eilenberg 2012).⁶

Similar institutionalization of religion can be found in non-highland minority communities in Southeast Asia during the same time period. For example, in the Cham and Khmer communities in Vietnam in the 1960s and 1970s, a series of movements led to the foundation of communal religious organization for Cham 'Ahier' – Hindu-influenced populations, Cham Awal – Muslim-influenced populations, Cham Sunni Muslims, and Khmer Buddhists. While the teaching programs affiliated with these organizations suffered from a lack of formal funding, they did partner with teaching programs that targeted the survival of minority languages.⁷ However, these examples contrast with the example of the Kaharingan religion, suggesting that parallels within highland and lowland populations are subject to a 'lowland bias' in educational institutions. For example, Kaharingan was still not recognized as a religion in Indonesia in 1979 and the religious community of the Kaharingan could not formally teach the Dayak language (Baier 2007:567). Nevertheless, the Kaharingan continued to shift and change their practices, slowly approaching compliance with the *pancasila* policy.

An important step in the reformulation of Kaharingan in compliance with *pancasila* was the first official publication of their holy book *Panaturan: Tamparan Taluh Handiai [The Origins: The Sources of All Being]*. According to Baier's (2007) Kaharingan history, the book dates to the colonial era. However, it was reorganized in 1973 in accordance with *pancasila*. The book's official (re)publication in 1996 further solidified the Kaharingan as a religious group. Meanwhile, the eventual setting of regular 'congregations' was perhaps the last critical step in the

⁶ This practice was revived when forming relations with Malay timber barons in the 1990s (Eilenberg 2012).

⁷ Open University in Ho Chi Minh City was allowed to hold Cham language classes in 2011. Cham language teacher preparation was taught at the University of Quy Nhon in 2007.

institutionalization of Kaharingan. While in some communities the weekly congregations were held on Friday mornings, the majority scheduled them on Thursday evenings, indicating a clear distinction from Christian and Muslim groups.

Finally, the setting of regular feast days was also critical. Recognition of May Harvest Day and the general feast/ New Year ceremony was important. Furthermore, the celebration of a special harvest day dedicated to Bawi Ayah, an incarnation of the Hindu goddess, Saraswati, who is also recognized in Bali, was a helpful move in the Indonesian state finally recognizing Kaharingan as an official religion and a form of Hinduism in 1980 (Baier 2007:566-570).

The eventual recognition of the 'Kaharingan religion' demonstrates how highland traditions were eventually incorporated into the state. As institutional boundaries shifted and were reformed over the course of the twentieth century, the place of the highlands as an abstract concept has come to be increasingly recognized in the scholarly literature on Southeast Asia. Examples of 'highland regions' have become more broadly defined and recognized as sub-regions capable of producing their own independent identities (Klokke 2012). Zucker (2013:115) observes that the Cardamom Mountains in Cambodia are "not only... a site of destruction, chaos and violence, but... also capable of producing and reproducing society and individuals."

This outside scholarly recognition has very real effect, impacting images of the highlands and 'the highlands' constructed as a scholarly imaginaire. For example, the recognition of the diversity of the highland regions of Southeast Asia has reached a peak, not with the identification of the extreme diversity of wildlife present throughout the region, but with the recognition that the highlands of Southeast Asia are the world's genetic rice bank, with high yield varieties, government subsidized seeds, maize, rising numbers of rubber crops, and a dramatic increase in black cardamom production (*Amomum aromaticum*) (Michaud and Forsyth 2011:70, 112, 116). It is thus unsurprising that the highlands have gained recent attention in Development Studies. Meanwhile, much still needs to be said for

the need to address the gaps and ruptures in communities that were created through American intervention in the region in the 1960s and 1970s. Importantly, this intervention created a global diaspora of Southeast Asian peoples that has greatly complicated the understanding of the cultures of the region. Maintaining an international perspective allows a better understanding of these studies' contributions.

FOLKLORE, RELIGION, AND RECONCILIATION

During the 1960s and 70s, when American and European scholars were barred from entering Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam, scholars responded by approaching Southeast Asia from a new angle. In this context, Lundstrom's 2006 ethno-musicological exploration of the oral repertoire of Kam Raw, a Kammu from upland Laos, offers a potential model for working with the diaspora communities. Lundstrom's study was conducted as a Kammu diaspora emerged from the conflict in Laos,⁸ and focuses on Kam Raw, an ethnic Kammu who left northern Laos in 1974, fleeing the expanding power of the Pathet Lao communists as well as the contemporary civil war in Laos. As a child in upland northern Laos he had learned several genres of oral tradition, which became increasingly important to him after he left Laos. These traditions became a means of remembrance, connecting him to his ancestral traditions.⁹ He then joined the Kammu folklore project, which had been founded in 1972 at Lund University, Sweden.

Similar to the collaboration in Klokke's book, as well as Mahin's explanations of the Kaharingan religion, the Kammu folklore project was a collaborative documentary work, focusing on

⁸ 'Working From Next Door' is a similar program that studied the cultures of the People's Republic of China through Chinese refugees living in Hong Kong at a time when the PRC was closed to foreign researchers.

⁹ More specifically, he had learned *team*, *trneam*, and *hrlii* vocal genres, referring to occasions of feasting, a genre of orally transmitted poetry and non-feasting occasions.

transcribing a compilation of Kammu folklore, with audio material included on a CD. The account is valuable primary source material providing great depth of detail that may eventually be used to promote the understanding of the Kammu community in Laos. It may also act as a stepping stone to reconciliation between the community and the state, as eventually happened with the recognition of the Kaharingan religion of the Dayak community of Indonesia in 1980 – as well as a potential reconnection with the ancestors through Tiwah ritual feasts and the *sandong* 'houses of the ancestors'.¹⁰

Collaboration was important to Klokke's contribution and also helped broaden the audience familiar with Dayak beliefs. Without UNICEF's penicillin providing an inroad of exchange into Dayak communities and Dr. Klokke's camera, and head nurse Emil Rabu (and his unnamed father who was a priest) who accompanied Dr. Klokke, the world might have lost a better understanding of the Dayak people, particularly in light of German and Swiss Christian missionaries' attempts to convert them. Dr. Klokke's project was also an outgrowth of Indonesian state medical missions that sought to incorporate the Dayak. With the help of figures such as those who inspired Dr. Marko Mahin's study, Agama Hindu Kaharingan was recognized as an official religion in 1980, providing a form of reconciliation between the Dayak community and the Indonesian state.

Another success story of reconciliation may be found in Zucker's (2013) studies of Cardamom Mountains where the devastation created by the Khmer Rouge has left many rifts in local communities. Zucker's story involves an elder Buddhist layman and an *acar* 'assistant to the monks' and former Khmer Rouge member. Because of his ties to the Khmer Rouge, he was shunned by his

¹⁰ For more on spirit houses, see Harrison (1996). A description of the role of these spirits appears in Rigg (1993:283). On connections between spirits and land in general in Thailand see Terwiel (1976:267), and Pathawee and Reichart (2007). See also Appendix One for cross-regional commonalities regarding spirit houses and deities.

former village, but was incorporated into the social fabric of another nearby community.

This story is worth telling because his former villagers never attempted revenge. An aspect of this potentially tenuous balance was that the *acar* did not understand himself as an *acar*, but rather that he served the community of *acar* and Buddhist monks, hoping to become an *acar* in his next life (Zucker 2013:77-84). For Zucker (2013) this is a clear example of 'intentional forgetting' to maintain favorable social and communal relations. Meanwhile, it is also clear from Zucker's studies that, within this process of 'intentional forgetting', certain elements of remembering must be brought to attention as 'memorialization' continues to emphasize the relationship between individuals, their ancestors, and the natural environment. This relationship is important when considering the potential impact of unchecked development in the region.¹¹

THE COST OF DEVELOPMENT?

The cost of development in the Southeast Asian highlands is a question to be explored from a regional perspective. The contours of this perspective, however, are in flux. Although the history of the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) as a concept are rooted in the era of American intervention in Southeast Asia, Glassman (2010) argues that today's GMS is the brainchild of the Asian Development Bank (ADB). The actions of the ADB regarding this region have greatly impacted, both negatively and positively, the lives of upland peoples and will continue to do so if the current scheme of development is continued.

The deeper context of the history of the GMS, combined with Glassman's (2010) warnings of the ADB's neo-colonial tendencies, add weight to the importance of a scholarly approach to the question of development in the Southeast Asian uplands. Glassman argues

¹¹ This statement could be extended to other cases, potentially world-wide, but also in the case of the uplands of China and other portions of Asia.

that the development schemes of the ADB in the GMS are closely tied to networks of state-oriented elites because they have established, to borrow from Walker (1999), 'regimes of regulation'. In the uplands of Borneo, Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos, Burma, and Thailand, the timber trade boomed in the 1980s, before these 'regimes of regulation', partially imposed through cooperation with timber barons, began to shift the political economy of the uplands. Glassman's familiarity with the political structures of Thailand ensures that his argument holds up well in that particular case.¹² However, if Glassman really sought to make a class-based analysis, why did his data set omit class structures in Cambodia and Vietnam? The more open climate for international academics in Thailand was a likely factor.

Regardless of issues in Glassman's data set, he provides a crushing critique of the overall structures of the GMS development plan, as guided by the ADB. Glassman argues that the ADB is based on a US-Japanese hegemony that controls an average twenty-five percent voting share of the membership board of the ADB, effectively blocking new members from joining the board. Furthermore, only three states, none of them Southeast Asian, are guaranteed positions on the ADB board. Finally, Indonesia, which has little to no connection with the geography of the Mekong, is the only country from Southeast Asia that has managed to operate with notable power in the ADB (Glassman 2010:42-44). It follows that within each country, class-based analyses might be employed to bring 'outliers', 'borderland peoples', 'non-state peoples', and 'highlanders' into the

¹² Here he defines the 'elites' as the 'Royal Family of Thailand' as well as 'Thaksin Sinawatra and the Shin group', the leaders of the Siam Cement Group (130 subsidiaries in China and Southeast Asia by 1998), the richest non-royal in Thailand: Charoen Sirvadhanabhakdi (head of Thailand's 'king of beers' Beer Chang), the Yunnan Hongta Group (a Chinese corporation with a twelve percent share in the Xiaowan Dam and a thirty percent share in the Yunnan Dachaoshan Hydropower Corporations), the advocates of the West to East Transmission Project (WETP) in China, The Western Regions Development Program (Xibu Dakaifa), the leaders of the economic reforms of the Đổi Mới era from Thailand, and investors in hydropower and mining industries (mining was the greatest increase in Laos from 1998-2005) (Michaud and Forsyth 2011:55-73; Glassman 2010:59-62, 71-87, 144).

state complex. From a global perspective, equitable development schemes demand greater representation from Southeast Asians. Development might then focus less on elite classes, guided by the neo-liberal assumption that benefits trickle down.

One must note that this is not always a desirable end for certain groups. Members of ethnic and religious minority groups may disagree on appropriate approaches to communal development. Greater attention to each individual case is required in future studies. In the struggle to promote a better understanding of marginalized populations, it is important to remember that 'borderlands' peoples are present in cities, towns, and small coastal villages that stretch across Southeast Asia, in addition to the highlands regions. It is only through developing a conversation that crosses disciplinary fields that scholars can gain a better understanding of the complexities of the borderlands of Southeast Asia and how these borderlands compare to other borderland regions across the globe.

APPENDIX ONE: SPIRIT HOUSES AND DEITIES IN THE ASIAN HIGHLANDS

These *sandong* may resemble 'spirit houses' familiar mostly to the untrained observer through the proliferation of imagery from Thai and Vietnamese cultures. However, the *sandong* differ from spirit houses in that burial pots are in their center. Occasionally, there are also statues said to hold the essence of ancestral spirits that are positioned outside the houses as part of the funerary rituals. The white paint on the faces of the statues outside the *sandong* is reminiscent of the white paint on the statues of ancestral gods of the Ahier Brahmanist-influenced Cham religious group in Vietnam today.¹³ Nevertheless, the Kaharingan religion appears to differ slightly from the Ahier religion of Vietnam based on the Kaharingan concept of the 'total deity.' The Ahier appear to have maintained the polytheistic elements of Hindu tradition, as the Kaharingan have

¹³ See image of the statues Po Klaong Car and his wife from the temple of Palei Craok – Bàu Trúc, Ninh Thuận, Việt Nam in Noseworthy (2013a).

shifted toward monotheistic beliefs in contemporary practice. The 'total deity' of the Kaharingan is represented by the figure of the '*sanggaran*' – a pole with a pot at the center of the pole and a *naga* snake.¹⁴ There are also eight spears that protrude up (four on each side) of the *naga* snake and a *tingang* 'hornbill' that symbolizes the upper-world of Mahatara.

The imagery of the 'total deity' in the Kaharingan religion parallels many images found across Southeast Asia, mostly in lowland regions.¹⁵ The *naga* snake appears prominent in the iconography of such historically and geographically disparate sites as Angkor Wat and Suvarnaphumi Airport, Bangkok. However, the symbolism of the 'total deity' of the Kaharingan religion differs in that this *naga* snake symbolizes the underworld of the deity Jata.¹⁶ 'Jata' harkens to the Sanskrit term meaning 'to be born' or 'brought into existence'. In the Kaharingan context, it may be understood as paralleling Christians notions regarding 'original sin'. In Southeast Asia, terms related to 'Jata' are diverse and widespread.

In Vietnam, the term 'Cham Jat' has occasionally been used by scholars to refer to the Ahier group of Brahmanist-influenced Cham. However, Sakaya (2013) recently clarified that the Cham Jat in Vietnam are actually a group of Cham who practice ancestral worship and shamanistic traditions. Meanwhile, in Cambodia, the term Cham Sot – 'Sot' being the Khmer pronunciation of the Sanskrit 'Jata' – has an entirely different meaning.

In Cambodia, the 'Kaum Imam San' or 'Bani of Cambodia' are an Islamic minority group who maintain Cham spirit possession rituals linked to ancestor worship. Pérez-Pereiro (2012) noted that in Cambodia, 'Cham Sot' is a Khmer language term and might be rejected due to its potential pejorative connotations. The variance of

¹⁴ *Naga* is Sanskrit for 'snake'. The image of the *naga* snake can be found throughout Southeast Asia in various forms.

¹⁵ This deity has been described as 'Ranying Hatalla Langit – Jata Balawang Bulau' – "a high god with male and female aspects" (Shiller 1996:412).

¹⁶ *Jata* is also associated with 'the water' and, according to nineteenth century accounts, was also known as 'Kaloe' in earlier oral narratives (Baier 2007:566).

the local usage of the term 'Jata' or 'jat' across the region demonstrates that its usage in the Kaharingan religion warrants further examination of the connections these terms have with Indic tradition.

The figure Mahatara 'great Tara' in the Kaharingan religion may harken to Indic traditions.¹⁷ According to Hindu traditions in India, Tara brought Īiva back to life after he consumed the poisonous *halalaha* plant. Hence, Tara, like the goddess Kali, has generally been associated with the underworld. However, in the Kaharingan religion, Mahatara is associated with the heavenly realm. It thus remains a possibility that certain Buddhist notions regarding the figure 'Tara', a bodhisattva, have influenced the Kaharingan faith. Despite these parallels, the Kaharingan religion has several unique images including the Batang Garing tree of life, the *sangiang* half deities who bear the same name as the priestly language, and the Tawing Tempon Telon (Rawing – the owner of the slave Telong) narrative with its emphasis on Dayak identity.¹⁸

¹⁷ Early European accounts recorded 'Mahatara' as 'Hatalla' and '*hatara*'. This deity has also been referred to as 'Bhatara Guru' (Baier 2007:566).

¹⁸ Baier (2007) notes that accounts appeared during the colonial era of Pataho deities (protectors of individual villages), and deities known as Indu Sangaman and Bapa Sanguman who watch over wealth and well-being. Tempon Telon watches over the protectors of individual spirits in the transition between this world and the next (Baier 2007:566).

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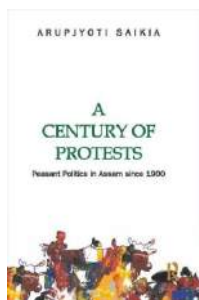
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REVIEW: *A CENTURY OF PROTESTS*

Reviewed by Uday Chandra (Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity)



Arupjyoti Saikia. 2013. *A Century of Protests: Peasant Politics in Assam Since 1900*. New Delhi and Abingdon: Routledge. xvi+480pp, 3 maps. ISBN 978-0-415-81194-1 (hardcover 97.49USD).

Notwithstanding its somewhat misleading subtitle, *A Century of Protests* is a painstaking reconstruction of the checkered agrarian history of the Brahmaputra Valley between the passage of the Assam Land Revenue Regulation of 1886 and the repeal of the Assam Tenancy Act of 1971 in 1986. The state of Assam in India today, bordering what is now Bangladesh, lies beneath the watchful eyes of the Eastern Himalayas, through which the mighty Brahmaputra gushes and breathes life into the valley. The landscape of the Brahmaputra Valley, historically speaking, has been as much a patchwork of field and forest as of different ethnolinguistic and religious groups, ever fluid and shifting in response to human and non-human vectors of change. The contested relations of power that yoke together owners and cultivators of this complex, variegated landscape in the late colonial and early postcolonial eras is the subject of the book under review.

Arupjyoti Saikia is a well-known historian of Assam, and, as he mentions at the start of the book, also the son of a committed communist who introduced him to the rural worlds of the Brahmaputra Valley. The book is primarily intended for historians of South Asia, especially those interested in eastern India. But the book also ought to be of wider interest to social scientists and historians

interested in the 'Zomian' borderlands between Inner, South, and Southeast Asia. Such detailed historical analyses of particular regions are useful for thinking through meaningful comparisons and contrasts within the region we now call 'Zomia' after Willem van Schendel's and James Scott's critical interventions. Does, for instance, the centrality of the modern state in Assamese peasant life fit our more generalized understanding of how lowland and upland politics differ? Equally, do the cultural dynamics of fluidity, hybridity, and ethnogenesis cut across the hill-plains divide? Saikia himself makes little effort to answer such questions or articulate comparisons and contrasts with other regions, but readers, the bulk of whom likely do not study Assam, cannot avoid doing so. Having said so, I must add that undergraduates might struggle with a historical monograph as narrowly conceived as *A Century of Protests*, though graduate students working on other parts of Zomia may find much of value in it. This monograph is, after all, the product of much intellectual toil on a well-defined subject rather than the next academic blockbuster on the bookshelf.

Arupjyoti Saikia's efforts, valuable in their own right, ought to be read alongside recent historical scholarship by Indrani Chatterjee (2013) on the workings of monastic governmentality between the eighth and eighteenth century, Gunnel Cederlöf (2013) on the pivotal role of climate and ecology in shaping the nature of colonial expansion under the East India Company, Jayeeta Sharma (2011) on the making of a tea plantation economy over the nineteenth century, and Sanghamitra Misra (2011) on the schizoid politics of the borderlands between Bengal proper, Nepal, and Assam in the late colonial era. Only one of these four critical reference points for understanding the region's history – Jayeeta Sharma's *Empire's Garden* (2011) – enters Saikia's bibliography, principally to indicate that Assam's tea gardens are beyond the scope of his study.

Nonetheless, the three unreferenced works listed above are useful in grappling with the contents of Saikia's book. For instance, the monastic orders that are central to Chatterjee's (2013) study figure quite prominently in *A Century of Protests*, much as in

colonial revenue records, as major landlords in British Assam even as their lay subjects are categorized in the language of the modern state as tenants, sharecroppers, and migrants, subdivided further as 'Hindu', 'Muslim', or 'tribal'. Labeled thus, we now have the basic ingredients for a state managing an agrarian economy, or for a later historian writing a history of the same economy using the state's categories. The latter is, alas, hopelessly caught in the epistemological tentacles of his sources, and this is why we must follow Chatterjee in probing silences and forgotten memories as we write histories of northeastern India today. Similarly, the perspicacious reader may discern different ecological niches within the Brahmaputra Valley throughout *A Century of Protests* but, instead of following Cederlöf's (2013) trail, Saikia focuses single-mindedly on tenurial relations as defined by the later colonial administration in eastern and western Assam. 'Land' here, stripped of its ecological underpinnings, is simply a bundle of political-economic rights, contested and negotiated between lord and peasant, mediated by the state from above, and subject to transformation over time; in sum, land tenure. As is so often the case, agrarian and environmental histories of a region look at each other from afar without speaking across intellectual barriers. Lastly, what constitutes Assam as a historical region is anything but self-evident, as those studying the borderlands of Bengal or Nepal know well. The case of Goalpara, as Misra (2011) shows, complicates any historical narrative of 'Assam'. For much the same reason, the territory labeled as East Bengal, East Pakistan, or Bangladesh over the past century, also poses a challenge for scholars and politicians of Assam. As Saikia recognizes, people circulate, borders change, and even the physical landscape can be altered by floods, earthquakes, and shifts in a river's course. Yet 'Assam' remains static, almost frozen in time, for the historian here as much as the Assamese nationalists that he describes.

Only when we set *A Century of Protests* within the context of the recent literature on the region can we appreciate the strengths and weaknesses of its key arguments. The arguments themselves are not always easy to follow amidst mangrove-like thickets of historical

narrative in which evidence and interpretation are intertwined, sometimes in less-than-transparent ways. Less-than-scrupulous copy-editing complicates the reader's task. At any rate, let me tease out three key arguments for readers. Firstly, Saikia argues that the agrarian economy of late colonial Assam ought to be understood vis-à-vis the interactions between the colonial state, traditional holders of large estates, peasant smallholders, sharecroppers, and landless laborers. Secondly, by the 1930s, the upper and middle strata of the Assamese peasantry had begun to rally around the Congress party that spearheaded India's nationalist movement; by contrast, sharecroppers and the landless, typically Muslim and/ or low in the caste hierarchy, came to be courted by the Muslim League, which promised fresh land settlements and occupancy rights to those at the bottom of the agrarian order. Thirdly, after decolonization in 1947, Assam became part of Hindu-majority India ruled by the Congress party, representing the landed gentry and better-off peasants in the region, and it was only in response to pressures from below, generated by communist-led militant peasant organizations, that land ceilings were halfheartedly introduced and a new tenancy law was passed to award occupancy rights to sharecroppers. These legal changes were, however, not always accompanied by radical social transformations on the ground. By 1986, the landed gentry had ensured that the hard-fought gains of sharecroppers were struck off the law books for the greater good of Assamese nationalism. Saikia's story of the Assamese peasantry, far from a cohesive group in any meaningful sense, over the past century is thus one of limited gains amidst the relentless oppression of agrarian elites who have come to control the state apparatus in postcolonial Assam since 1947.

A Century of Protests undoubtedly presents a much-needed and powerful narrative about the dismal condition of the Assamese peasantry in late-colonial and postcolonial eras. The historical data in the book are drawn from an impressive range of government and popular sources, with which the author appears intimately familiar. Saikia brings to bear his deep familiarity with the region's agrarian structure and politics and his political sympathies for the

smallholder, the sharecropper, and the migrant laborer in this extensive study. At various points in his narrative, he complicates the notion of the 'peasant' by bringing in gender, religion, caste, and intra-regional variations, thereby adding both richness and texture to the historical narrative. The central claim regarding the continued dominance of the landed gentry and the upper peasantry contrasts strongly with other regions in postcolonial India that experienced either a state-directed Green Revolution or popular mobilization from below that reordered agrarian hierarchies. While Punjab and Uttar Pradesh are good examples of states within India that have benefited from the Green Revolution, West Bengal and Bihar are examples of states in which mobilization in the name of class and caste respectively have ended the hegemony of the old land gentry that exercised power during the early postcolonial decades of Congress rule. By any such metric, Assam fares poorly. Its agrarian economy, as the book's conclusion states emphatically, has not progressed much beyond the nineteenth century. It is against this socioeconomic background, Saikia suggests, that we ought to understand the ethno-nationalist violence directed at 'outsiders' in the Brahmaputra Valley since the mid-1980s. Such violence forms the staple of a great deal of journalistic and social scientific commentary on the region.

The undoubted strengths of the book should not, of course, prevent us from appreciating its weaknesses, especially with an eye to future scholarship that can fill existing lacunae. Let me delineate three key weaknesses here.

- (1) The all-too-common notion of the 'peasant' is a problematic one where the agrarian structure does not afford most cultivators either ownership or occupancy rights to land. In the book under review, 'peasant' explains little, and arguably obscures how so-called 'peasants' see each other. An economy dominated by sharecroppers and landless laborers, including circulating migrants, requires an altogether different conceptual apparatus suited to the

political economy and ecology of the region under study. One possibility might be to take seriously emic conceptions of caste that are necessarily correlated with hierarchies of labor and land in Assam and elsewhere in South Asia. Such conceptions of 'caste' need not be seen as antithetical to 'class' to the extent that the former cannot avoid accounting for the social relations of production in a given agrarian context.

- (2) A history of a place must attend carefully to the historical processes that produce it. Assam exists *sui generis* no more than any other place inhabited by humans. Yet Saikia draws too sharp a line between East Bengal and Assam, which may have made sense to those who wrote and archived government revenue files but less so to those whose lives crisscrossed these administrative demarcations. Despite its leftwing sympathies, therefore, *A Century of Protests* cannot avoid the trap of Assamese (sub)nationalism that takes colonial state space to be its destined resting place. Likewise, the book falls into the trap of Indian nationalism, especially as it closely follows the official government line on the Muslim League, borders, and refugees. These traps might be avoided in future if closer attention were paid to place-making processes along with the inclusions and exclusions that they invariably entail at different points in time. Doing so requires, of course, interpreting the same archival materials differently.
- (3) Whereas brief historical sketches of 'gender', 'migrants', and 'tribes' appear in the fringes of the book's narrative, fuller accounts remain to be written. One hopes that not all of these future accounts will assume the same economic lens that Saikia does. Such a lens distorts and caricatures. For instance, when women or 'tribes' make a

fleeting appearance in this book, they are depicted as 'spontaneous' and oddly belligerent protestors, seemingly devoid of the capacity for calm, rational political action that permit the typical male peasant to negotiate the state from below. What we see here is a kind of unwitting mimicry of the communist vanguards who set out to mobilize the Assamese peasantry from the 1950s onwards. Their failures ought to carry at least some lessons for future historians of the region.

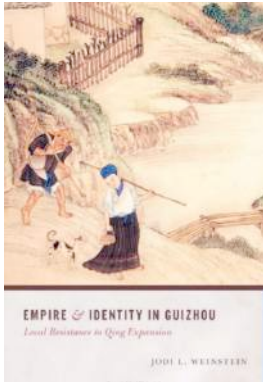
Paradoxically, these weaknesses make *A Century of Protests* a must-read, as much as its ambitious approach and solid grasp of the many details of Assam's agrarian history. Arupjyoti Saikia has done a stellar job of placing before us a wealth of historical evidence to mull over and think through comparatively. It will be the task of future historians of the Brahmaputra Valley to launch their own ships from this most hospitable port.

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REVIEW: *EMPIRE AND IDENTITY IN GUIZHOU*

Reviewed by Yu Luo (Yale University)



Weinstein, Jodi L. 2014. *Empire and Identity in Guizhou: Local Resistance to Qing Expansion*. (Studies on Ethnic Groups in China.) Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press. xvi+217pp, 3 maps (xiv-xvi); foreword by Stevan Harrell, acknowledgments, notes, Chinese glossary, bibliography, index. ISBN 9780295993270 (paperback \$30.00); ISBN 9780295993263 (hardback \$75.00).

Vagabonds, swindlers, bandits, and rebels. These figures may lie in quiet corners of Qing archives, but under the pen of historian Jodi Weinstein, they not only come alive, but ring out their voices, enmeshed with regional history and state formation. Focusing on the Zhongjia, who are believed to be the forbears of the current day Buyi (Bouyei) *minzu* – one of China's fifty-six state-designated nationalities – Weinstein is interested in how members of such a lesser-known ethnic group in late imperial China's southwestern frontier responded to state centralization with ingenuity. Giving equivalent attention to both imperial and indigenous perspectives, Weinstein carries out a careful, honest examination of historical narratives and livelihood strategies from below. *Empire and Identity in Guizhou: Local Resistance to Qing Expansion* is thus a timely and refined contribution to the recent waves of scholarship engaged in reappraising agency and livelihoods in the Sino-Southeast Asian borderlands, also known as 'Zomia' in Scott's 2009 influential monograph *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*.

Strikingly similar to the local gazetteer materials Scott quotes at the outset of his book, Weinstein's opening archival source in

Chapter One concisely depicts Guizhou's recalcitrant landscape that led to the frustration of a central administration seeking to control local territories and peoples. Indeed, such harsh terrain served as the backdrop of the dialectical relationships between those who intended to rule and those seeking relative autonomy. For Weinstein, it is essential to understand how local subjects deployed the social, economic, and cultural resources available to them, in the face of state attempts to centralize and standardize. In this first chapter, which provides a concise overview of major themes and perspectives, Weinstein also describes how scholarship in other disciplines lends insights to this study. Following Michaud and his colleagues, including anthropologists and human geographers, Weinstein astutely identifies the 'livelihoods approach', seeking to engage the adaptability and flexibility of subjects at the margins in maintaining their identities and lifeways. To compensate for the lack of written records by the Zhongjia themselves, Weinstein looks to folk literature and ritual texts translated into Chinese as selective historical narratives.

In Chapter Two, Weinstein contextualizes the Zhongjia in the natural and cultural mosaic of Guizhou. The chapter starts with well-known explorer Xu Xike's journal, which illustrates a rugged terrain inhabited by hostile natives – an ecological and human landscape that many still find intriguing. The challenging topography and unfavorable climate, along with limited arable land needed by an increasing population, placed severe constraints on local agricultural livelihoods and commercial activities. The Tai-speaking Zhongjia were among those who lived off Guizhou's limited resources. By presenting the ethnic and historical origins of the Zhongjia, Weinstein rightly points out that their identity was not only permeable through administrative definitions (especially in regard to the contemporary Buyi and Zhuang) but, more interestingly, they were paradoxically seen as intractable and acculturated at once. Further explicated by Weinstein in later chapters, the outward manifestation of 'Sinicization' – such as language borrowing or attire changing – may underplay the broad spectrum of livelihoods strategized by the Zhongjia. While primarily introducing the Zhongjia,

Weinstein also gives due attention to other groups in this historically multi-ethnic landscape, including the Lolo (Nasu Yi), the Miao, and the Han. This chapter ends with a brief account of how imperial authorities from the Yuan and Ming dynasties to the early Qing period imposed governance through *tusi* 'hereditary native chieftains' that produced a "patchwork quilt" with converged zones controlled by native officials and regular administrative units (34-35). This geo-political landscape could be regarded as a semi-periphery, or an internal frontier, and is further examined in the following chapters.

Chapter Three pursues how the Qing sought to penetrate the Zhongjia areas in central and southwestern Guizhou, aiming at imposing direct political control over what Weinstein labels "semi-state spaces." In such areas lying between state and non-state spaces, neither native officials nor regular administrative units "functioned well enough to meet the government's increasing demand for standardization and centralization" (40). Therefore, following his predecessors and yet to a larger extent, the Yongzheng Emperor strove to consolidate imperial rule and order, most clearly through the *gaitu guiliu* policy starting from the 1720s. This policy aimed to reform the native chieftaincy by coopting it back to regular centralized administration. Weinstein picks up Scott's (1998) analytic of 'seeing like a state' that theorizes state legibility and rationality to examine such intention to change and reorganize an internal frontier into full-fledged state spaces. As the Qing imposed its order by siphoning power from native chieftains and establishing new stations and administrative units, the Zhongjia areas witnessed a mix of reactions. For instance, conflict and resistance burst out in Dingfan-Guangshun, where commoners' livelihood choices, including raiding and banditry, were much affected by the arrival of direct imperial rule. This differed from the early-stage compromise experienced in the newly established Nanlong Prefecture along the Guizhou-Guangxi border.

In view of Guizhou's tenuous environmental conditions, with precarious livelihoods increasingly subjected to imperial governance, the next two chapters feature local figures such as self-styled ritual

specialists, who strategized diverse livelihood choices. Chapter Four offers a rich account of local Zhongjia unwilling to submit to consolidating rule from the center, based on criminal cases recorded in imperial archives. Weinstein analyzes three money-making schemes by local Zhongjia that took place in different parts of Guizhou in the mid-1700s. The Zhongjia in these three cases, mostly in pursuit of economic interests, capitalized on local fears of illness or disaster and poverty-induced desperations. This was seen by the Qing authority as a potential political threat, as they partly deployed anti-dynastic slogans and millenarian rhetoric. Much space is given to the case of Huang San, which captures a cross-border situation where religious and ethnic networks exceeded administrative boundaries. At this fluid tri-provincial frontier, Huang San and some self-proclaimed Mo ritual specialists (*bumo*) deployed master-disciple networks, and resorted to chicanery using good-luck charms and alchemy, as well as prophecy and impersonation of a 'new king'. Two other illegal cases presented by Weinstein also involved local villagers being cheated and used to collect money or plot raids.

The protagonists in all three instances, Weinstein suggests, were familiar with Han Chinese culture as well as imperial rule. Nevertheless, they appropriated certain elements to achieve mobility and interests that might have run against the will of the Qing state. This kind of "state mimicry" (82) also points to the unintended consequences of *xianghua* 'advancement toward civilization' on a group like the Zhongjia, who were somewhat Sinicized and yet still intractable.

Weinstein pays special attention to the heterogeneous decisions made by local Zhongjia. She expressly notices the law-abiding Zhongjia subjects in the archival accounts who, presumably for such reasons as self-protection or civic duty, chose to comply with the Qing's legal terms, instead of turning a blind eye or being complicit in illicit money-making activities. In general, Weinstein highlights local Zhongjia who developed intricate strategies and networks linking social and economic resources and magico-religious practices.

Relying on local traditions and religious networks in similar fashions, the Nanlong Uprising examined in Chapter Five was among the minority rebellions with the greatest impact in Guizhou during Qing times. In 1797, Zhongjia religious masterminds, Wang Niangxian and Wei Qiluoxu, initiated a large-scale armed rebellion against Qing rule that revealed long-existing social tensions. Concurrent to major rebellions in other parts of the Qing empire, the Nanlong Uprising is also a landmark event in the history and historiography of the Buyi and related groups. It remains important to local memories and historical narratives. Weinstein, providing the first Western-language analysis of this event, seeks to differentiate from ethnohistorical interpretations by earlier scholars in China, who were bound to the socialist state's agenda. Instead of interpreting the uprising as a peasant struggle against feudal oppression, Weinstein regards the Nanlong Uprising as an elaborate expression of livelihood decisions motivated by local ecological and economic constraints. Most notably, Weinstein uses folk literature in comparison to official archives, seeking to uncover indigenous voices. She demonstrates that central figures like the 'Immortal Maiden Wang' were depicted in local memories and narratives as charismatic leaders acting against poverty and injustice with supernatural skills. These dominant figures developed cult groups and banditry allegedly sanctioned by Heaven. Such tactics, deployed in accordance with traditional beliefs and local landscapes, made Qing suppression challenging. Despite the fact that the rebellion was eventually pacified with the help of some 'loyal' natives and by combined military forces from different regions, Weinstein interprets folk narratives emphasizing moral victories as implying that potential malcontent and unrest may remain dormant.

As concluding remarks, Chapter Six puts forth broader implications and contemporary connections in regard to peripheral landscapes and ethnic peoples, while complicating the understanding of the Qing polity as a multi-national empire. Comparing Guizhou to other peripheries of the Qing, Weinstein suggests that the ideal of configuring a multicultural Qing empire faced special challenges in

Guizhou, given the lack of any shared linguistic, cultural, and religious reference points. Weinstein shows that the Qing authorities engaged in twin processes of civilizing and domestication that sought to impose both moral and socio-political transformations over Guizhou's geographical and human landscape. In the meantime, the efforts to consolidate imperial rule – partly through knowledge production, including ethnographic collections like the Miao albums – underscored an uneven power dynamic. The Zhongjia, as explained by Weinstein, never intended to achieve total autonomy, nor were they granted similar legitimacy as the Manchus, Mongols, Han, Tibetans, and Muslims under the partially inclusive rubric of the Qing's 'great unity'.

Complicating the ethnic hierarchy that concerns Emma Teng (2004) in her study of Taiwanese indigenes, Weinstein regards the Zhongjia as placed between more recognized groups such as the Tai, and those least recognized and incorporated by the Qing such as the Miao. Conditionally acting 'like the Han' or as 'no different from the Han', the Zhongjia appropriated literacy, rituals, symbols, martial arts, and supernatural skills, and sometimes developed extralegal livelihood means. For Weinstein, these resistance strategies enabled constant and continual conversations with imperial authorities and, in turn, contributed to the 'fragile hegemony' of the Qing enterprise that was never complete.

It is also in this last chapter where Weinstein pinpoints how examinations of Guizhou's past shed light on its present, which echoes her first chapter. During fieldtrips in Guizhou, Weinstein observed the kind of uneven opportunities faced by the Buyi and other ethnic groups, even though minority culture has now become a great asset for potential development through commodification and tourism. While these new forms of livelihoods are state-promoted rather than extralegal, Weinstein finds that some locals tend to selectively adopt those strategies that serve their own priorities, without sacrificing their agency. Reminiscent of the trick that served well for the Zhongjia who sought to "maintain as much room to maneuver as possible and, if possible, negotiate a little more" (123), this kind of pragmatism lives on.

Weinstein painstakingly pieces together images of Guizhou's changing landscapes and, in particular, those of an ethnic people that were somewhat absent from previous scholarly discussions. Building on solid historical studies, such as Herman (2007), which emphasize indigenous response to China's colonization of the region, Weinstein's book also carries analytical and methodological significance. Most importantly, the in-between position of the Zhongjia and their semi-state spaces open up a productive venue to engage the interactive dynamics of structure and agency, as well as of state and society. Rather than treating 'Sinicization' as teleology, Weinstein suggests that 'advancement towards civilization' was by no means a *fait accompli*. Some Zhongjia:

... chose not to advance toward mainstream Chinese culture and instead to advance in their own way, by making the livelihood choices that best suited their economic and cultural needs (130).

This denotes that local subjects were not merely reacting to state power, but constantly innovating and refashioning their lifeways, often based on trial-and-error processes. Nevertheless, one wonders about the possible realms and broader implications of such agency, highlighted by Weinstein, as "a shifting matrix of conflict and compromise" (58). To what extent could agency be played out, and how sustainable could such livelihoods be? In other words, if the imperial hegemony was incomplete, were the indigenous resistances also somewhat fragile or limited, and certainly, always contingent and conditional?

Drawing from various primary and secondary sources, Weinstein also brings the politics of knowledge production and modes of representation into question. Reminding us that archival production is a consequential act of governance (Stoler 2010), Weinstein critically engages imperial records and contemporary *minzu* studies constrained by dominant representations and political agendas at the time they were produced. Moreover, while ethno-historical accounts of minorities in China's southwest

periphery tend to focus on local elites, Weinstein seeks to rescue the voices of seemingly insignificant commoners by applying the livelihoods approach to historical analysis. Reading between the lines and against the grain allows her to glean local perspectives from the archives and, in turn, allows us to recognize the agency of subaltern groups.

On the other hand, the scarcity and complexity of both archival and oral materials, especially those concerning the Zhongjia in Guizhou, pose challenges for Weinstein to reproduce historical events and figures in the greatest detail possible, though she is aware and honest about such limitations. For instance, to further examine how a female like Wang Niangxian, acting as a ritual specialist and also as a rebellion leader, became so outstanding in a patriarchal society, one could only make certain assumptions. Likewise, one would need to extrapolate the exact rationales and sentiments underlying the wide range and variety of reactions of local Zhongjia.

By and large, the livelihoods approach emphasized by Weinstein can indeed be applied to both historical and contemporary settings. As Harrell notes in his foreword, embedded forms of agency indicate, "how little has changed even as so much has changed" (viii). Weinstein's insightful analysis of how subjects at the margins have been seldom passive, but instead have actively engaged local conditions and external forces, echoes ethnographic studies of the contemporary situation. Michaud puts forth in the conclusion to *Moving Mountains: Ethnicity and Livelihoods in Highland China, Vietnam, and Laos* (2010:225):

[A]s in any other situation around the world involving ethnic minorities in modernizing states, the lesson is that culture, ethnicity, and agency play core roles in livelihood decision making, alongside local politics and history.

Weinstein's book therefore helps foster greater interdisciplinary dialogues among scholars of the Sino-Southeast Asian borderlands, and perhaps, also has significant global relevance.

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NON-ENGLISH TERMS

bumo 布摩

Buyi 布依

Dingfan 定番

gaitui guiliu 改土归流

Guangshun 广顺

Guangxi 广西

Guizhou 贵州

Han 汉

Huang San 黄三

Lolo 佬佬

Miao 苗

minzu 民族

Nanlong 南笼

Qing 清

tusi 土司

Wang Niangxian 王孃仙

Wei Qiloxu 衛七綰須

xianghua 向化

Xu Xiake 徐霞客

Yi 彝

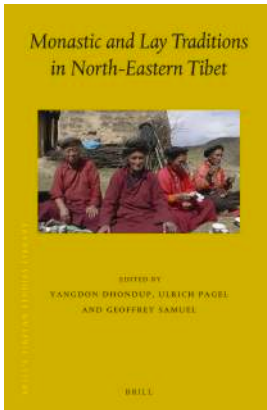
Yongzheng 雍正

Zhongjia 仲家

Zhuang 壮

REVIEW: *MONASTIC AND LAY TRADITIONS IN NORTH-EASTERN TIBET*

Reviewed by Benno Weiner (Appalachian State University)



Yangdon Dhondup, Ulrich Pagel, and Geoffrey Samuel (eds). 2013. *Monastic and Lay Traditions of North-Eastern Tibet*. Leiden and Boston: Brill. viii. +244. Four Maps, fifteen illustrations, preface, index. Volume 33, Brill's Tibetan Studies Library. ISBN: 978-9004255692 (hardcover, 112.50USD).

Monastic and Lay Traditions in North-Eastern Tibet, edited by Yangdon Dhondup, Ulrich Pagel, and Geoffrey Samuel, is the product of a 2011 workshop convened at St. Michael's College, Llandaff, Cardiff. Although the conference's focus was the tantric practitioner community of the Reb kong region (Ch. Tongren), the resultant volume expands the scope of inquiry to include surrounding areas as well as monastic communities. The editors have organized the volume's nine chapters into three sections, the first on the Dge lugs pa monastic establishment, the second on Rnying ma pa and Bon tantric communities, and finally 'Ritual and Performance in Contemporary Reb kong'. While the chapters are all informative and scholarly, providing new, important empirical detail on an under-researched subject, several tend toward the descriptive. The most successful contributions, however, present their findings within larger analytical and contextual frameworks, giving their chapters explanatory weight beyond the more narrow confines of their studies.

After a short preface by the editors, Geoffrey Samuel provides a useful historical and ethnographic introduction to the Reb kong region, which he situates within the "multiethnic context of A mdo" (5). Noting that "both Reb kong itself and the wider A mdo region

today presents a complex ethnic patchwork" (7), Samuel suggests that ethnic, religious and political identities have long been fluid and should be investigated as such, adding, "The rigid process of identity-definition within modern states tend to mitigate against doing this, as do the complexities of contemporary politics in culturally Tibetan regions" (10). This is admittedly a formidable challenge, as Charlene Makley alludes to in her own chapter, requiring the researcher overcome a series of conceptual, logistical, and political obstacles. Nonetheless, although the subsequent chapters often refer to Amdo's frontier nature, except in the case of religious diversity *within* the region's Tibetan Buddhist and Bon communities, only rarely do the authors engage these knotty historical and social dynamics in a meaningful way.

Perhaps the volume's most fully conceived and delivered chapter is its first. In 'Remembering Monastic Revival: Stories from Reb Kong and Western Ba Yan', Jane Caple builds upon previous scholarship, including that of Makley and Hildegard Diemberger, in an effort to locate "emic perspectives" on religious revival in the post-Mao period (23). Examining oral and written accounts "produced by monks who were involved in the process of monastic revival," Caple argues,

Their rememberings add depth and texture to our knowledge of this period, contributing new empirical details and, moreover, an understanding beyond that contained within the narrative frame of state-society relations (23-24).

She finds that the revival of public religious practice in the early 1980s depended on a "social reordering and the re-formation or resurgence of the moral community underpinning monasticism in general and in the particular 'mass' form revived at this time" (31). Exploring the "public performance of monkhood through the wearing of monastic robes" and "the reclamation of monastic space," Caple describes

the reinscription of the social and spatial boundaries between lay and monastic communities that underpin the ethical relationship

between monks (in their roles as a field of merit and providers of ritual services) and the laity (in their roles as patrons) (32).

Lastly, Caple argues that present-day remembering of the early period of monastic revival affirms a "moral past" that "allows room for ethically motivated reforms" in a perceived period of "moral decline that threatens the continuity of monasticism" (43).

Makley's own short, thought-provoking contribution, 'Reb kong's Klu rol and the Politics of Presence', is perhaps the volume's most theoretically and methodologically sophisticated. Focusing on a dispute over the authenticity of a 'deity medium' during Reb kong's increasingly well-known and commercialized harvest festival (Klu rol), Makley attempts

to see beyond the 'freeze frames' of most tourist and state portrayals of *Klu rol*, and indeed of scholarly accounts of the festival, to appreciate the actually dynamic politics and ongoing high stakes of these performances for both ordinary Tibetans and for state officials (190).

She suggests that Tibetan and Inner Asian "politics of legitimacy, power, and causation [...] are manifest most importantly in what I see as a ritualized *demand for presence* among Tibetans" (190, italics original). While acknowledging "that legitimate presence has always been ambivalent or indeterminate in these Tibetan frontier regions especially" (191), Makley argues that in the post-Mao period there has been an "unacknowledged agreement among residents not to publicly address the histories and political economies of specifically Tibetan sources of (divine) authority" (192). This "silent stand-off," made momentarily audible (if unintelligible to most onlookers) by the *Klu rol* dispute, has had the effect of silencing "speech and performance that would threaten CCP legitimacy, even as the reforms seemed to allow a great, so-called 'revival' or 'rebuilding' of Tibetan practices and institutions" (192). Makley concludes with several methodological suggestions and their implications for researchers willing to pursue the "politics of presence."

In 'Money, Butter, and Religion: Remarks on the Participation in the Large-Scale Collective Rituals of Rep kong Tantrists', Nicolas Sihlé seeks to identify the motivation for participation in "optional,"

large-scale, extra-local rituals among Buddhist and Bon po tantric specialists. Sihlé asks:

according to what concerns do the religious specialists choose to take part or not? And what do these elements tell us about these specialists and for instance the possible constraints and tensions within which they operate (166)?

The questions are intriguing, even if Sihlé's answer is less provocative and surprising than he suggests, especially to recent generations of students of Tibetan history conscious of the interconnectivity of the social, political, economic, and religious. Noting that tantric specialists are largely lay practitioners who in many cases are also heads of households, Sihlé argues that participation may often come down to the weighing of anticipated material benefits against potential costs, in other words, "motivation of a primarily material, economic nature" (166). Sihlé confirms, however, that the boundaries between 'religious' and 'economic' motivations are porous. For example, he readily admits that:

the economic dimension may also in a number of cases be intimately and complexly related to matters of prestige and perceived qualities of the masters and the rituals they oversee and support (179).

This, of course, underscores why the "emic perspective" pursued by Caple and Makley is both so attractive and elusive.

The volume's most ambitious contribution is perhaps Paul Nietupski's chapter, 'Understanding Religion and Politics in A mdo'. Nietupski writes, "The different taxonomies or shifting clusters of religions and associated political visions co-existing in A mdo can be understood as a 'polythetic' phenomenon," a theory borrowed from biology in which inclusion demands, "there be only some common features in all communities; all communities do not have to possess a single common feature" (70). Taking the Sde khri Estate of Bla brang Monastery as a case study, Nietupski argues, "there were three main political structures in A mdo and at Bla brang," internal monastic

officials, nomadic lords, and monastic representatives (73). As such, he insists,

A mdo was not a place of anarchy, inhabited by uncivilized bandits, where the regional states and civilizations were not governed. [...] A mdo was not an empty wilderness, but a region with a distinctive political and religious heritage (81).

In seeking to demolish a presumption few scholars today would likely entertain, Nietupski asserts that A mdo should be considered a "recognizable unit, but that its unity was based on a criteria very different from that of other governments" (68). Yet, particularly in light of the region's other socio-religious communities, which Nietupski admits were excluded or only partially subject to these institutions (82), instead of a 'recognizable unit,' one wonders if this 'polythetic' framework renders A mdo so liminal that its analytical potential is lost.

Space limitations prevent full reviews of the remaining chapters, all of which contain important empirical research. In 'Rules and Regulations of the Reb kong Tantric Community', Yangdon Dhondup continues her path-breaking exploration of the history of the Reb kong region with a focus on the development of its unique tantric community. Here she demonstrates that the members of the region's Rnying ma monasteries were primarily lay tantric practitioners, concluding, "It is this 'lay' component that not only explains the differences in their rules and monastic duties, but constitutes one of the main elements of their identity" (117). Building on Dhondup's earlier work, Heather Stoddard contributes biographical notes on the life of the founder of Reb kong's Rnying ma tantric community, 'Rig 'dzin dpal ldan bkra shis (1688-1743), as well as a summary of some of his writings.

In the volume's one Tibetan-language chapter, Gedun Rabsal provides a political biography of Rong bo Monastery's seventh Shar Skal ldan rgya mtsho, Blo bzang 'phrin las lung rtogs rgya mtsho (1916-1978). Despite serving in the Communist regime in the 1950s, the author argues that the Shar Lama's "way of resistance was to use his religious education and standing" (49). Arrested in 1958 and

dying twenty years later while still incarcerated, Gedun Rabsal contends, "His life story parallels the history of modern Tibet" (49). Collin Millard's contribution focuses on Reb kong's Bon community, identified as A mdo's second largest (147). Millard employs existing literature as well as limited fieldwork to argue:

In Reb kong the unique religious institutions and sequence of annual rituals carried out by both Bon monastic and lay practitioners have served as a powerful resource in maintaining a sense of identity in the Bon community (141).

In the volume's concluding chapter, Dawn Collins turns our attention to tantric ritual dance (*'cham*). Although Collins concedes that her findings are preliminary, her proposal

that the practice of *'cham* reinforces both social hierarchies and those of religious institutions, and revitalises Tibetan identities through reinforcing connection to homelands and to an enacted visionary tradition (229)

seems well grounded and, as she suggests, worthy of further research.

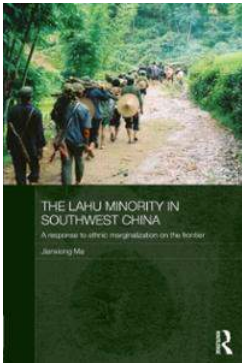
In fact, in many cases the contributions to *Monastic and Lay Traditions of North Eastern Amdo* represent early stages of research, or are part of larger, ongoing studies. With the eventual publication of the fruits of that research, our understanding of the Reb kong region and its religious communities will expand greatly. Yet, despite A mdo's (and Reb kong more specifically) oft-mentioned status as a frontier, borderland, and liminal space, if there is an aggregate shortcoming to the volume it is its failure to satisfactorily investigate that diversity and complexity. Nonetheless, without exception the authors provide a great amount and variety of new empirical detail, and at times ask compelling questions and offer useful conceptual frameworks that give their studies significance beyond their immediate focus. Those interested in the Reb kong region of A mdo or Tibetan Buddhist and Bon tantric communities more generally would be wise to take note of this important volume.

REVIEW: *RE-CONSTRUCTED ANCESTORS AND
THE LAHU MINORITY IN SOUTHWEST CHINA*

Reviewed by Shanshan Du (Tulane University)



Ma Jianxiong. 2013. *Zai zao de zu xian: xi nan bian jiang de zu qun dong yuan yu Lahuzu de li shi jian gou* 再造的祖先：西南边疆的族群动员与拉祜族的历史建构 [Re-Constructed Ancestors: The Mobilization of Ethnic Groups in (China's) Southwest Frontier and the Construction of Lahu History] Hong Kong: Chinese Hong Kong University Press. vii +210pp. Illustrations (maps and photos), bibliography, appendixes, timetable. ISBN: 978-962-996-501-3. Paperback = HKD120.



Ma Jianxiong. 2013. *The Lahu Minority in Southwest China: A Response to Ethnic Marginalization on the Frontier*. London and New York: Routledge. xvii + 252 pp. Illustrations (figures, tables, plates), acknowledgements, technical notes, appendixes, Chinese glossary, notes, bibliography, index. ISBN: 978-0-415-50558-1 (hbk 72 GBP); ISBN: 978-0-203-11564-0 (ebk). Hardback = USD156.75; Kindle = USD131.17; Kindle rental = USD38.70.

Written in Chinese, *Re-Constructed Ancestors: The Mobilization of Ethnic Groups in [China's] Southwest Frontier and the Construction of Lahu History*, consists of an Introduction, Conclusion, and five chapters. Following a critical review of the literature, in the Introduction, Ma presents his groundbreaking analytical framework

and methodologies concerning the ethno-history of southwest China, and the history of the Lahu in particular.

Entitled 'The Ethnic Politics in the Hinterland of the Ailao Mountains',¹ Chapter One explores interethnic relationships in China's southwest frontier region. By vigorously examining the historical documentation of officials and scholars, as well as archival records at the local level, Ma convincingly demonstrates the critical role that precious economic resources played in the dynamics of ethnic identity and inter-ethnic interaction in response to the expanding control of the Central Government of Imperial China (CGIC). In order to control the salt wells, tea production, and silver mining in the Ailao hinterland, the CGIC began to implement the policy of *gai tu gui liu* 'replacing indigenous leaders with bureaucrats' in this area from the time of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). Until the Tianqi era (1621-1628), however, certain Ailao areas were controlled by complex indigenous forces, who, because of their threats to the transportation of salt, tea, and silver by government and private merchants, were disparagingly referred to as *tu zei* 'indigenous bandits' and *ye zei* 'wild bandits' (42).

After the early 1700s, the Manchu Imperial Court of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) radically intensified control of this area, not only by forcefully replacing the remaining indigenous political leaders, but also by confiscating their land and salt wells. The corrupt officials appointed by the CGIC levied heavy taxes and seized the land on which indigenous peoples depended for their very survival, resulting in increased conflict with the indigenous population. During the eighteenth century, several highland indigenous peoples, who were lumped together as "the Luo Bandits" (54), revolted repeatedly against both local officials and government control (60-61). By the time of the Daoguang era (1821-1850), the "ethno-ecology" (44) of the Ailao hinterland had undergone such a dramatic transformation that the number of Han immigrants exceeded that of the indigenous population. During this process, the CGIC incorporated the elite of

¹ The Ailao Mountains are located in the central region of Yunnan Province in southwest China.

some indigenous populations into its administrative apparatus. In contrast, however, the Luohei, one of the indigenous groups who were identified as relentless rebels (61-62), were excluded from participating in local administration and also expelled from the Ailao Mountains west of the Lancang (Mekong) River.

Chapter Two, 'Lahu Religious Movement and Mobilization of [Ethnic] Identity', examines the development of the Luohei/ Lahu identity within the context of their ancestors' defeat and retreat from Ailao in 1796 (72), and their ongoing revolt against Qing control until 1904 (79). Ma successfully demonstrates the connection between the Luohei in Ailao and the Luohe/ Lahu in the Luohei Mountains west of the Lancang River, located in contemporary Lancang and Shuangjiang counties. Whereas the Luohei revolts in Ailao areas were characterized by political and economic orientations, the later Luohei/ Lahu resistance was shaped primarily by fervent religious movements. Ma demonstrates how a Buddhist messianic movement originally started by two Han monks in 1799 (76), generated regional social organization and mobilization among the Luohei/ Lahu. Among contemporary Lahu, the history of their resistance is intertwined with their mythology and local legends concerning Xeul Sha Buddha, which combines Buddhism with a pair of supreme dyadic god(s) in the indigenous Lahu religion (82). Ma argues that originating from confrontational interactions between certain indigenous peoples in Ailao as they first encountered state power, the formation of Luohei/ Lahu identity was later re-created and restructured by incorporating the organizational power of Buddhist movements into the Lahu value system. This process is marked by 'identity mobilization', rather than 'identity drift', as was the case of the Qiang who were squeezed between the Han and the Tibetans (Wang 2003).

Entitled 'Frontiers and Frontier Rebels', Chapter Three explores historical processes by which the delineation of China's southwest frontier and the development of the Luohei ethnic identity interfaced. Ma examines the first wave of Han immigrants who entered Yunnan when the central government of the Ming Dynasty stationed soldiers

in the area charged with opening up the lush, uncultivated land. Through the example of several historical figures, he shows that immigrant elite frequently served as middleman, negotiating between officials, immigrants, merchants, and the leaders of indigenous ethnic groups regarding such matters as tributary, trade, and resource exploitation. He also argues that after driving the rebellious Luohei out of the Ailao hinterland, the CGIC named the place of the Lahu ancestors' retreat the 'Luohei Mountains'. This area became a fluid geo-political buffer between CGIC and Burma, the latter having maintained a tributary relationship with the former. After a British demand to draw up borders between Burma (a British colony) and the CGIC in 1880, the CGIC began to formally incorporate the Luohei Mountains into its administration system. During the transformation of China's Southwest frontier, the identity of the Luohei people was strengthened. Ma vividly demonstrates that historical documentation of the process of Lahu identity formation and development corresponds to migration legends and religious rituals found among contemporary Lahu people.

Based on solid archival research and a comprehensive investigation of historical literature, Chapter Four ('Frontier Politics and the Paradigms of Ethno-History') examines the paradigms of the historical documentation of the Luohei/ Lahu by the central Chinese government after the mid twentieth century. During the Nationalist regime (1912-1949), Yunnan Province was primarily controlled by regional warlords, who were the elite of some of the powerful ethnic minorities in the region. Ma poignantly argues that while these elites in Yunnan generally overlooked the differences between the Han majority and the ethnic minorities, a few minority scholars in other provinces of southwest China began to highlight their ethnic distinctiveness and negotiate their positions within the framework of the multi-ethnic Chinese state. During that same period, however, historical records concerning the Luohei were scarce, largely reflecting their marginality and powerlessness, even among local ethnic minorities. Ma further examines the official recognition of the 'Lahu', (which replaced the derogatory term 'Luohei') as a distinctive

min zu 'nationality' during the process of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) establishing Lancang Lahu Autonomous County in the early 1950s. Ma demonstrates that the contemporary Lahu 'nationality' is derived from their distinctive historical conflicts with state control, rather than being one 'allocated by the state' through the Nationality Identification Project initiated by the CCP.

Chapter Five, 'Searching for a History Originating from Qinghai', explores the Lahu's own reconstruction of their ethno-histories since the 1990s. Following the social evolutionary paradigm and utilizing a linguistic approach, the official (elite) version traced the origin of the Lahu to the ancient Qiang in Qinghai in northwest China. In a Lahu village on the west side of the Lancang River, Lahu history was reconstructed mainly through the route of soul-calling rituals, which intertwine Lahu cosmology with social memories associated with their ancestors' revolts against state control, and their subsequent retreats. On the east side of the Lancang River, where the ancestors of the local Lahu submitted to state control after major defeats, less tension with the state is embedded in the ritual and cosmological reconstruction of Lahu history, reflecting many generations of peace in this area. According to Ma, the official/ elite version, in spite of its extreme methodological deficiency and analytical insufficiency, has predominated and shaped other versions of indigenous reconstructions of Lahu history. Challenging the dominance of both the state and the ethnic elite in constructing ethno-history in China, Ma concludes the book by appealing for more academic attention to local constructions of ethno-history rooted in the identity struggles found in ordinary villagers' everyday life.

This book offers a groundbreaking study of the ethno-history and ethnic identities of China's southwest frontier. The methodological combination of vigorous historical examination and extensive ethnographic fieldwork is admirable, and the utilization of maps and photos is effective. Challenging conventional Chinese paradigms concerning the state and ethnic identity in China, and complementing Western approaches to this subject (Harrell 1995, Schein 2000, Mueggler 2001, Wang 2003), Ma provides an

innovative framework exploring the interplay between resource competition, state control, local resistance, and the development of ethnic identity. By presenting the Lahu as counterevidence, Ma (27-70) particularly confronts Scott's (2009) theorization of upland Southeast Asia and southwest China as 'Zomia', a specific geopolitical zone that has attracted the voluntary migration of minorities with flexible ethnic identities seeking to escape state control and modernity. Ma (39) demonstrates that upland areas where the ancestors of the Lahu originally resided were incorporated into the central Chinese government through a system of *tu si* 'hereditary native chieftain' during the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1386). Additionally, the Imperial Chinese state made little distinction between upland and lowland when implementing the *tu si* system or later, when replacing the *tu si* with its regular bureaucrats (55-64). Within such a historical context, Lahu ethnicity was *intensified* in their process of resisting increased state control since the Qing Dynasty, *irrespective* of the altitude of the mountains where they either resided or retreated to (Chapters 1-2). Notwithstanding the significance of this book, however, its international accessibility is severely limited by a prerequisite requirement for mastery of both the Chinese language and local history.

Written in English, *The Lahu Minority in Southwest China: A Response to Ethnic Marginalization on the Frontier* is a work that promises to be far more accessible to international audiences. This book consists of six main chapters (2-7) in addition to the Introduction and concluding chapters. Complementary to the historical orientation of *The Re-Created Ancestors*, this solid ethnography is based mainly on Ma's extensive fieldwork in a Lahu village on the west side of the Lancang River since 1995.

While introducing the subject matter, theories, and methods, the first chapter also provides the historical background of the construction of China's southwest frontier during the Qing Dynasty. Entitled 'The Escape of E Sha Buddha: Ethnicity and Political Movements in the Black River Valley', Chapter Two describes the geographic, demographic, and ecological conditions of the Black

River Valley and explores the social change and the inter-ethnic relations in this area since the 1920s. Ma vividly presents personal accounts of the escape of the E Sha/ Xeul Sha Buddha, a dyad of male and female supreme god(s) in the religion of the Lahu, in the village that represented the center of Lahu religious movements against state control until its religious organization was destroyed at the turn of the twentieth century. Ma argues that by evoking such religious interpretations, Lahu villagers vocalize their perceived contradictions between Lahu principles and the radical social change induced by the socialist and post-socialist Chinese state.

Complementing one another, chapters Three and Four examine marriage and kinship relationships in the Lahu village where religious belief and socio-economic reality are tightly intertwined in villagers' everyday life. Chapter Three, 'Death Threat and Self-Negation: Tension and Pressure in the Spiritual World', examines the Lahu cosmic view of a dyadic and gender-egalitarian world, which is believed to have been created and maintained by E Sha or E Sha Buddha (63).² Within this cosmic world, the lives of Lahu villagers were believed to be influenced by a myriad of spirits, especially the spirits of their immediate ancestors, who serve as "omnipresent spiritual guardians of the families of their living children" (56).

In Chapter Four, 'Marriage and Land Property: Bilateral, Non-Lineal Kinship and Communal Authority', Ma brilliantly presents the pivotal role that the supernatural beliefs of the Lahu play in shaping the social and economic organization of Lahu village life. The Lahu indigenous social organization is fundamentally based on marriage and a consequent bilateral kinship system, which is based on egalitarianism in general, and gender egalitarianism in particular (Du 2002). Ma demonstrates that authority of the parental couple is sustained not only by codes of ethics, but most importantly through continual ownership of the land, even after they have divided it equally among their sons and daughters as each one marries. Supernatural authority, ultimately through E Sha, but practically through the spirits of deceased parents, serves as the communal

² Also see Du (2002, 2003) and Walker (2003).

authority over the lives of parallel and equal households co-headed by husbands and wives. Frequent ritual interactions between adult children and their deceased parents become occasions for household and community members to appeal to supernatural authority for the cure of disease or the reversal of misfortunes which are believed to have been caused by any possible violations of social or moral codes.

Chapter Five, 'To Become Wives of the Han: Conflicts, Marriage Squeeze, and the Resettlement of Women', explores the outflow of Lahu women to marry Han men in other provinces since the 1980s. Rural Han men have had increasing difficulty in marrying within their ethnic group because of the sex-ratio imbalance, and the consequent skyrocketing of bride-price resulting from the birth control policy and the Han preference for sons over daughters (Shi 2009). Ma reveals that in spite of administrative barriers against such a practice, socio-economic conditions, inter-ethnic relations, and intricate 'middlemen networks', exist and have engendered waves of one-way migration and resettlement of Lahu women into rural Han areas. He demonstrates that while many Lahu women voluntarily left their home place to seek a better life, some tragically became the prey of deception or abduction. Ma argues that the representation of "advanced" Han and "backward" Lahu in the modernization discourse are hidden factors in this process of the "marriage squeeze" in the Lahu area (159).

Chapter Six, 'Poverty Reduction and Education', examines the negative impact of poverty reduction projects and education on everyday Lahu life. According to Ma, poverty reduction was a major policy of local government administrations at the level of the county, particularly in the Lahu township and village under study. Since the limited revenue of the local government could cover only a small portion of its expenses, much governmental funding allocated for poverty reduction was appropriated in order to maintain the function of this administrative apparatus. While implementing poverty reduction projects, the cadres require Lahu villagers to participate in 'education' sessions and to provide matching labor and resource for these projects. Ma argues that these poverty reduction projects and

their subsequent education programs were essentially "performance" (169) – a concept Ma utilizes to suggest an administrative showcase accompanied by corruption, reinforcing the hierarchical dichotomy between the 'advanced Han' and 'backward' Lahu. Additionally, negative representations of Lahu identity infiltrate the public education system through local educators and cadres.

Chapter Seven, 'Suicide as a Cultural Response and an Indicator of the Change in Social Relationships', investigates social and cultural underpinnings of the high incidence of suicide among Lahu in the Black River Valley and nearby areas. Through thorough archival research, Ma convincingly demonstrates the high suicide rate in that area at the peak of the Cultural Revolution (189). Based on first-hand data gathered from the village where he has conducted long-term ethnographic fieldwork, Ma describes many suicide incidents, and demonstrates the dramatic increase of suicide frequency since 'the first decade of the twenty-first century.' In his detailed account of five suicide cases, Ma delves into the deeper socio-political background that lies behind the specific reason given for each death. Ma argues that the high incidence of suicide among the Lahu of the Black Valley area can be understood as a cultural response to their enormous suffering as a result of ethnic marginalization, particularly through the interaction of Lahu religious beliefs and dire socio-economic conditions, as well as through the increased disintegration of their traditional family and social structure. Notwithstanding the valuable data and analysis presented in this chapter, readers would have a more comprehensive understanding of Lahu epidemic suicide if the author had also taken into account the significant role played by the love-suicide songs of traditional Lahu oral literature (Du 2004, 2008).

In the concluding chapter, Ma recaps the book, and further suggests that the Lahu are situated at the most powerless end in the spectrum of power structure of China's *minzu* 'nationalities', particularly in regard to the effectiveness of minority cadres in representing and seeking resources for their own ethnic groups. Ma maintains that while it first originated from historic movements

against state control, the extraordinary level of Lahu marginalization is also a consequence of the breakdown of Lahu social organization by the political upheavals that occurred during the Mao era (1949-1976), and the exacerbation of socio-political circumstances since the 1980s.

This book greatly enhances understanding of the struggle and sufferings of a minority people who are extremely marginalized and almost invisible in China's "nationality politics" compared to such nationalities as Tibetans, Hui, Naxi, and Dai (2). Primarily grounded in solid ethnographic fieldwork, archival research and historical records effectively supplement the data. The balance between an analysis of the complexity and dynamics of identity representation and an ethnographic examination of social organization and religious belief deserves special applause. Notwithstanding the overwhelming impact of the state, and the institutionalized negation of Lahu identity, however, some readers might hope to learn more about the agency of contemporary Lahu in China. Specifically, the dedication to, and strategies of, some Lahu elite and folklore specialists in defending and preserving their own culture might have been addressed.

Overall, these two books engage in dialogue with each other as an in-depth ethno-history and an engrained ethnography of the Lahu people, respectively. Complementing one another, they jointly serve as very helpful resources for scholars and graduate students interested in the complex relationships between the state and marginalized ethnic groups, particularly those of southwest China and Southeast Asia.

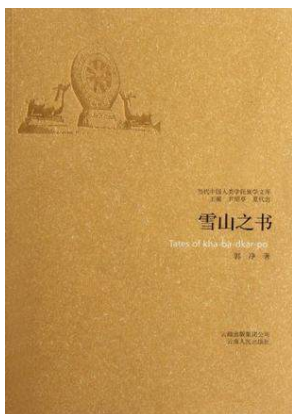
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REVIEW: *TALES OF KHA BA DKAR PO*

Reviewed by Jundan (Jasmine) Zhang (University of Otago)



Jing Guo 郭净. 2012. *Xue shan zhi shu* 雪山之书 [*Tales of Kha ba dkar po*] [ཁ་བ་དཀར་པོ་]. Kunming 昆明: Yunnan People's Press 云南人民出版社. 531pp, ethnography, notes, oral history, 134 photos, 29 maps, and 5 illustrations. ISBN: 9787222088979 (paper, 68RMB).

My favorite color is to add a little white on the whiteness, as if there was a snow-white eagle landing on a snow-covered mountain rock. My favorite color is to add a bit green on the greenness, as if there was an emerald parrot flying in the wild walnut woods. *Deqin xianzi lyrics*.

These lyrics evoke a space beyond a sense of realism. In his book, *Tales of Kha ba dkar po* (*ToK*), Guo mentions these lines three times, suggesting a transcendental experience one may encounter in Tibetan areas while, at the same time, humbled by the mindset of human-nature relations enacted by Tibetan people. *ToK* is, in many ways, a valuable academic work. Guo's favorite lines of *xianzi* allude to a 'space-in-between' the secular and sacred, which provides a unique experience for a broad readership, and induces the readers to deeper reflections on topics such as 'nature/ culture', 'belief', 'rite', and 'life/ death'.

ToK is one of nineteen contemporary anthropological and ethnological works conducted in Yunnan Province, Southwest China and published in the 'Anthropology and Ethnology series in

Contemporary China'. In the preface for the series, Yin (2012) suggests that there are two primary reasons for the somewhat slow development of Chinese scholarship in the field of anthropology and ethnology. One is the historically Han-centered intellectual atmosphere, and the other is the ideological ambivalence that ethnic culture has faced since the establishment of the People's Republic of China. In this context, Guo's longitudinal academic and intellectual engagement with the Tibetan communities in northwest Yunnan is included in this series as part of the increasing recognition of the significance of understanding southwest China's complex ethnic and cultural diversity.

The book consists of eighteen chapters. According to the author's postscript, the book is a compilation of stories he collected since first visiting Deqin in 1995, and a tribute to the people he encountered in his research journeys. It is difficult to clearly categorize this book, as it blends Guo's personal reflections, as well as ethnographic materials from the field. Employing a narrative style, Guo elegantly relates these stories from around Kha ba dkar po, one of the most significant sacred mountains in Tibetan areas, and the only one whose summit has never been climbed by humans. Located in Deqin County, Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Kha ba dkar po has been central to the cosmology of the Bon religion and Tibetan Buddhism at least since the early Tubo era¹ and, Guo argues, even earlier. However, since the late twentieth century Kha ba dkar po has become increasingly exposed to non-Tibetan populations, primarily in the form of climbing expeditions and tourists. Kha ba dkar po has also become known as 'Mt. Meili' after a government survey in the 1950s erroneously identified it thus. 'Meili' is used as a name in tourist literature, though it lacks the historical and spiritual significance of 'Kha ba dkar po' to Tibetans. On this point, Guo argues that:

¹ According to van Schaik (2011), the Tibetan Empire started with the first emperor Srong bstan sgam po's uniting of Tibetan Plateau in early seventh century.

Kha ba dkar po is a sacred site, [but] Mt. Meili is a secular and scenic site. Two names for the same place reflect the different perceptions and understanding of different groups towards it (223).

The whole book can be seen as narratives organized around the sacred/ secular attributes of Kha ba dkar po and how different groups perceive and adapt to these attributes. In investigating cosmology and ecological knowledge in Deqin County since 1995, Guo became fascinated by and familiar with the area. His book sheds light on important topics such as sacred geography, indigenous conservation, tourism, and intangible heritage. This book is thus not merely an 'ethnographic' record of a particular 'locality' but, instead, presents a complexity that comes as what Tsing (2005:6) calls "universals not as truths or lies but as sticky engagements," in which the narratives from the research area intersect and traverse the local and the global.

Generally following chronological order, Guo starts the book with a mysterious tragedy in 1991, when a group of Japanese and Chinese mountaineers died while climbing Kha ba dkar po. Guo explains that his long-term engagement with Kha ba dkar po started from an investigation of how local villagers, as well as the general public, perceived the 1991 tragedy. Based in Shar tang Village, Guo collected stories from villagers in Shar tang and nearby villages, such as Me long and Gsal nang. In the different narratives, a contrast emerges between the general public's views of mountain climbing as "representing human beings' spirit to endlessly challenge their limits" (49), and villagers' views that the "sacred mountains must not be summited" (42). Another attempt to summit Kha ba dkar po in 1999 evoked furious discussion on the Internet. Critical questions appeared, such as whether climbing Kha ba dkar po helps to better understand the mountain or to demean it, the difference between Tibetan people's beliefs and mountaineers' spirit, and to whom Kha ba dkar po belongs. These questions elicited inquiry in broader contexts, where it became clear that varying opinions on mountaineering reflect different understandings of the relationships between humans and nature.

How local Tibetan villagers interpret and adapt to environmental changes in further relation to the role of 'sacred mountains' in an ecological and cosmological sense is thus one focus of the book. Chapter Three investigates the 'growing numbers of wolves' in Deqin County as an illustration of the belief system deployed by local Tibetans. The majority of the villagers Guo talked to consider the growing incidents of wolves harming animals and people to be spiritual in nature, because wolves are considered the 'guard dogs' of Kha ba dkar po.

Chapter Four extends the problem of wolves to the shrinking Me long Glacier, which is significant as the largest glacier in Yunnan Province, and the glacier whose tongue has the lowest elevation in China. Me long Village is directly influenced by this glacier, because of its degradation and because of its spiritual significance. Since the 1991 mountain-climbing catastrophe, Me long villagers have been involved in the search for the victims' remains. While trying to help the bereaved families, the villagers also believe that the bodies have contaminated the glacier. In addition, infrastructure improvement and tourism development in the glacial area in recent years are believed to be disturbing the sacred mountain. According to the villagers, the bodies of victims, rubbish left by tourists, and such inappropriate behavior as talking and laughing loudly, breaking tree branches, and picking flowers, lead to many accidents associated with the Me long Glacier. These stories indicate that, while locals are exposed to modern scientific knowledge, a strong tendency to interpret environmental changes through spiritual notions remains. Guo's suggestion is to "listen carefully to the stories of local people on how they have gotten along with the 'wild' for generations" (78) in the conflict between human and non-human interests.

It would be naïve and simplistic to think that Guo is attempting to promote a preservation of 'indigenous knowledge' and maintain an unchanging past. After being in the region for almost two decades, Guo humbly proposes, "I believe one should have two spaces, one secular and the other sacred. What matters is that one can travel in between these two spaces freely" (412). Much of the book is in fact

about how people from different times and spaces try to travel between the secular and sacred. From historical figures, such as Western missionaries and explorers, to more contemporary environmentalists, volunteers, and tourists, Guo records stories about encounters with Kha ba dkar po as 'outsiders' (both Westerners and people from elsewhere in China) have had with Kha ba dkar po. Guo states that "we are all just a small part of the crowd who attempts to peep into Kha ba dkar po's secrets" (20). No matter what we do, or desire, the mountain is always there. Although this is perhaps a reflection on the privileged position of 'humans' vis-à-vis 'nature' that is gazed-upon by humans, a certain kind of criticality is absent here. There is a missed opportunity to engage with theories of Orientalism and Postcolonialism that might better illuminate the issue of the researcher's positionality.

The whole book is permeated with an aura that reminds us of the Tibetan belief that humans are forever living in Samsara, which suggests that our current life is only part of the journey of existence. However, people *travel* differently, which nowadays includes tourists with outdoor clothes and cameras arriving by jeep and airplane (Chapter Nine), the *ab cor* 'circumambulators' keep walking to complete their *skor ba* 'circuits' (Chapter Twelve and Seventeen). The interaction between humans and nature in Deqin County cannot easily be defined by the categories of ecocentrism and anthropocentrism, which are often used by scholars to describe environmental attitudes (Drenthen 2011). Guo points out that the cosmology derived from Tibetan Buddhism is successional rather than disruptive (Zhang 2009), that human beings are the same as other beings, comprised of the five basic elements (earth, water, fire, wind, and 'space'), and thus, for Tibetans, nature and culture do not stand as a binary. Guo suggests that it is useful to understand Kha ba dkar po as well as other sacred places in northwest Yunnan as 'sacred natural sites', a term which is defined as "areas of land or water having special spiritual significance to peoples and communities" (Wild et al. 2008:5). Tibetan communities in northwest Yunnan have a long-established natural resource management system that is

integrated with their belief in the mountain as a spiritual channel between humans and deities. People's subsistence needs are closely related to forest and pastoral resources, and such dependence reinforces the belief that people are protected by the sacred mountains. Rituals, folklore, and other forms of intangible cultural heritage, such as dances and songs, are some of the many forms that show such belief (Chapter Thirteen, Fourteen, and Fifteen). While the functionality of 'sacred natural sites' has been noted and recorded, Coggins and Gesang Zeren (2014) argue that there is still much to learn about the distinctions between ontology and cosmology, in order to avoid a simple deployment of deities in nature conservation.

Besides texts, Guo also presents several photographs, as well as maps and illustrations drawn both by him and local villagers. As one of the earliest ethnographers in China to include digital photography in his research, Guo confesses that the digital camera is the 'digital eye' of so-called 'modern people', and it sees a different 'reality' from that of locals. With awareness that a researcher/outsider's camera often tends to capture local life as timeless and fixed, Guo tries to avoid such misinterpretation by including more recent changes in this region. One of the most urgent issues that arises is the conflict between development and conservation.

Guo argues that many conservation programs are dependent on the epistemology of 'ecocentrism' and are ignorant of the omnipresent interconnections between humans and nature. Guo then suggests that only if conservation in Tibetan communities becomes internalized and ritualized can humans recover our connections with nature. The emphasis on indigenous ecological knowledge can be found in the field of 'cultural ecology'.

Rappaport (1979) argued that religion and ritual were forces that preserved ecological stability, and non-Western subsistence systems were dependent on the "coherence, orderliness, and meaningfulness of conceptual structures (that) liturgy organizes" (129). On the other hand, other researchers such as Netting (1993), contend that social institutions and practices function as the basis for more ecologically benign pre-capitalist societies, and destruction

comes with the authoritarian force that reforms and breaks such social institutions and practices. Related to Rappaport and Netting's arguments, Guo observes that "some people are thinking: should Tibetans keep their simple lifestyle and belief, or turn into performers of culture in order to satisfy the secular desire of consumption?" (213). By addressing such thoughts from local Tibetans, Guo shows concern about economic transformations and their impact on Tibetan villagers. However, Guo insists that instead of further pursuing the reasons behind such thoughts, the villagers themselves should be left alone to decide for themselves. This lack of engagement with the political, social, and economic context weakens Guo's argument.

I read Guo's *Tales of Kha ba dkar po* during my 2013 fieldwork in Niru Village, Luoji Town, Shangrila County, northwest Yunnan Province. Tibetan communities are highly diverse in language and custom as evident in the differences between Niru Village and the villages that Guo studied. Nevertheless, there are many similarities between Niru Village and the Tibetan villages in Guo's encounters. The transcendental sense hovering between the lines of the book often blended with the moisture in the air on the rainy days during August and September in Niru Village. When the rain hindered farm work or when electricity was cut, people sat by the fire, drinking *sulima* (a liquor made from herbs and mixed with yak butter tea), chatting, or doing wool craft. Sometimes I sat beside 'Grandma' and read a few pages from the book. She would gaze at the book and smile in a puzzled way. I pointed to the book, saying, "Kha ba dkar po," and she would nod and reply, "*Gzhi bdag*" 'mountain deity', and would then carry on with her handicraft. *Tales of Kha ba dkar po* is not only about one sacred mountain in a Tibetan area, but is also an in-depth inquiry into every reader's heart and soul. Reading the book, I often felt I was chatting with Guo Jing, which made me reflect on my own position as a researcher, for he never stops including himself in the gaze of his digital camera. Whatever I wish to claim that I understand from this book, or my fieldwork, Guo reminds me that we all have different 'ways of seeing'. Ethnography perhaps is one such 'way of seeing' (Wolcott 1999:270) but:

no matter if you are tourists who come to climb the mountain, researchers who come to investigate culture or nature, or tourism companies who come to plan future itineraries, you are all just seeing whatever you want to see.

Perhaps the deeper meaning of Kha ba dkar po will never be fully understood. Perhaps we should think of life as a journey, and be grateful to travel between the spaces of the secular and the sacred. Nevertheless, echoing the increasing attention to the Sino-Tibetan borderlands (Yeh and Coggins 2014), Guo's work in Deqin contributes to a better understanding of the grand transformation of political, economic and physical landscapes in modern China.

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NON-ENGLISH TERMS

ab cor ཨབ་ཙོར།

Deqin xianzi 德钦弦子

Deqin 德钦 County

Diqing 迪庆 Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture

Gsal nang གསལ་ནང།

gzhi bdag གཞི་བདག།

Kha ba dkar po ཁ་བ་དཀར་པོ།

Luoji 洛吉 Town

Me long མེ་ལོང།

Niru 尼汝 Village

Shar tang ཤར་ཏང།

skor ba སྐོར་བ།

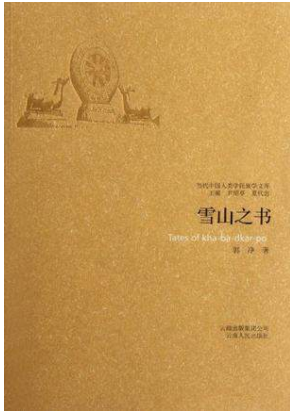
Srong btsan sgam po སྟོང་བཙན་སྐམ་པོ།

sulima 酥里玛

xianzi 弦子

REVIEW: *TALES OF KHA BA DKAR PO* (CHINESE VERSION)

Reviewed by Jundan (Jasmine) Zhang (University of Otago)



Jing Guo 郭净. 2012. *Xue shan zhi shu* 雪山之书 [*Tales of Kha ba dkar po*] [ཁ་བ་དཀར་པོ་]. Kunming 昆明: Yunnan People's Press 云南人民出版社. 531pp, ethnography, notes, oral history, 134 photos, 29 maps, and 5 illustrations. ISBN: 9787222088979 (paper, 68RMB).

我最喜爱的颜色是白上再加上一点白
仿佛积雪的岩石上落着一只纯白的雏鹰；
我最喜爱的颜色是绿上再加上一点绿
好比野核桃树林里飞来一只翠绿的鸚鵡。
——德钦弦子歌词

这几句歌词来自云南迪庆藏族自治州德钦县地区的藏族歌舞形式，弦子。德钦藏民通过歌舞唱答的方式表达对生活的理解和向往。其中深深浅浅的内涵常围绕与自然，山水，万物生灵的联系而展开。以上几句歌词营造了一个飘渺的，超越现实的诗意时空，同时其语句间勾勒出来的藏族人民对山林草木那种质朴的感情又将人拉回现实。以弦子为媒介，歌唱者和听者都在超世和现世之间游走。在《雪山之书》中，作者郭净前后三次提到这几句歌词，不仅透露出他本人对其中意境的欣赏喜爱，也同时借弦子自身的本土魅力将读者引入一个介于世俗和神圣之间的境域，令人不禁对诸如“文化／自然”，“信仰”，“仪式”及“生死”之类的主题加以思索。

《雪山之书》是由云南人民出版社计划出版的《当代中国人类学民族学文库》系列中的一部民族志作品。在文库的总序言中，主编

尹绍亭为当代中国在人类学民族学学界的发展发出了质疑：为什么中华土地上众多民族各有其独特社会文化历史，建国以来科学工作者对文化多样性的关怀，尊重和理解却相对落后？他认为其中一个重要原因应归结于自古以来根深蒂固的中原中心主义，将汉族和“中国”作为世界的中心而对其他民族和地域缺乏理性包容的文化观。文库的出版正体现了当代人类学民族学学者对改变这一缺失和匮乏而做的努力。

同其他文库收录的作品一样，《雪山之书》是由学者经过长期田野调查研究后的学术著作。然而《雪山之书》的特别之处在于，该书是作者郭净将自己自1995年第一次拜访德钦以来，在滇西北藏区深入行走并同当地社区民众和文化团体互动合作的体验记录重新整合组织后的文集。该书包括十八章，其中有些篇章曾经通过其他渠道发表。通过各种平台，无论是作者的个人博客，电子杂志，还是学术期刊，纪录片，摄影展，郭净都试图将他多年来在滇西北藏区的参与交流同更多社会群体分享，促进公众与藏区人民之间的深层次交流和理解。从这一点来说，该书不是一部普通意义上的学术著作，而是一部挑战传统学术表达方式的作品。这是郭净在2003年转山归来的一篇文章写到的为自己定下的原则：“以外在的旅行作为内心修行的方式，先做行者，再做作者；走进，而不是走过一个地方，直至它成为另一个家园；跟朝圣者而不是旅游者一起旅行；以当地人为师，尽量学习当地人的语言和生存方式，努力掌握地方性知识；带尽量简单的摄影装备，或者只带自己的眼睛；在调查地已走路为主，或者只乘坐当地的班车；在行动和思考中创造适合于自己的“个人的知识”，不再盲从任何学术体系：自己创作的文字和影响作品，都要给当地人分享”（郭净，2003）。郭净将其对自身经历的反思与田野调查中人物事件的观察聆听结合起来，把卡瓦格博的故事娓娓道来。

海拔6740米，坐落在云南迪庆藏族自治州德钦县和西藏边界，卡瓦格博意为“白色雪山”，是在藏区享有盛名的一座神山，也是少数尚未被登山队登顶的雪山之一。郭净指出，根据当地僧俗大众传统的认识，“卡瓦格博”既是主峰的名称，也是以主峰为首的一组神山的统称。自20世纪末以来随着登山探险和旅游开发的日益流行，卡瓦格博在藏区之外的名声也越来越大，然而却是以“梅里雪山”的名字出现在大众的视野中。一座山为什么会有两个名字？原来在20世纪50年代解放军从德钦进藏时翻越雪山途经与卡瓦格博在同属一条澜沧江西岸山脉的药山梅里，于是在军用地图上将整条山脉都标为“梅里雪山”。1957年云南省交通厅修筑公路，绘制当地地图时卡瓦格博被明

显标注为“梅里雪山”，由此这一地图错误被沿用至今。尽管近些年有些官方出版的新地图对此做了正确标识，“梅里雪山”已经成为一块吸引游客的金字招牌。郭净在田野中细心的发现，在媒体和公众广泛接受“梅里雪山”的同时，当地的藏族人只在说汉语的时候才把这座山叫做“梅里雪山”，而在说藏语时依然使用“卡瓦格博”这一有神山含义的名字来称呼它。命名不能改变山的本质，但却影响和改变了人与环境的关系。针对这一“神圣／世俗”的双重使用，郭净指出：“卡瓦格博是‘圣地’，梅里雪山是‘景区’，两种名称，反映了不同人群对这座山的了解和认识。‘梅里雪山’知名度的扩大，无形中剥离了卡瓦格博所包含的文化和宗教属性，而将它的自然属性独立出来”（第223页）。

针对“神圣／世俗”的反思和探索可以看作是一条贯穿《雪山之书》全书叙述的主线。通过对德钦藏区人文地理的深入了解，郭净不断从当地传统生态知识和神山文化中透露出来的宇宙观中看到神圣与世俗的联系。因此《雪山之书》不仅仅是对某个地点或地域特殊性的民族志“写真”，更致力于结合近年来备受环保人士和学者关注的神秘地理学，生态／大众旅游，非物质文化遗产等话题进行广义上的讨论。郭净强调，不同人群对“神圣／世俗”这一看似对立实则紧密联系的两元特质持有不同态度和观点，学习了解这些态度和观点可以帮助我们更好地认识其中的复杂性。这同很多国内外学者的意见不谋而合，如杜赞齐教授（Prasenjit Duara）探讨世俗世界的超越性

（Duara, 2011），以及人类学者罗安清（Anna Tsing）认为我们应认识到普世性并非简单的非黑即白，而是常常模棱两可的（Tsing, 2005）。郭净笔下的人物和事件也向读者展示了普通人的故事是如何穿越并链接起“本土”和“全球”的。

《雪山之书》从1991年的“梅里山难”开始，按时间顺序介绍同卡瓦格博的“缘起”。1991年一组由中日登山队员组成的探险队在攀登卡瓦格博主峰时不幸全部罹难。媒体对这次中国和日本登山史上最惨重的山难做了持续报道，但当地人对山难，甚至攀登卡瓦格博的态度却不为人知。于是1998年作者借博士论文调查的机会来到德钦县卡瓦格博附近的西当村（Shar tang），斯农村（Gsal nang）和明永村（Me long），以“梅里山难”为切入点，了解当地藏族与雪山的关系。通过调查倾听当地人的讲述以及对照媒体和大众对“登山”展开的谈论，两种截然对立的观点涌现出来：主流媒体和大众认为登山显示了“人类挑战极限的内在精神是永无止境的”（第49页），而当地人却

认为“他们厉害的话可以爬其他的山，我们的神山不能登”（第42页）。的确，德钦藏民从开始便因为自己的神山信仰而试图劝阻登山行动。通过一些环保组织在德钦藏区的调查，神山信仰终于初次被一些环保人士所了解。在千禧年即将来临时，“梅里雪山千年登顶”行动又一次策划组织汉藏登山队员攀登卡瓦格博。这一举动在互联网上引发热烈的讨论。很多人开始质疑攀登卡瓦格博目的何在，到底是要征服它还是更好的尊重它，登山队员的勇气和藏族人民的信仰区别何在，以及卡瓦格博到底属于谁？这些从攀登卡瓦格博引出的问题从更大的层面上来说，也清晰地反映了一个人对登山这一运动的态度同他/她如何理解人与自然的关系息息相关。

随着同德钦藏民深入讨论为何卡瓦格博不是一般的山而是神山，作者进一步讲述德钦藏民是如何通过“神山”这一概念认识和适应当地的生态环境变化的。第三章“狼之祸”中，卡瓦格博地区村民将近年来数量急增的狼群现象和其他自然灾害解释为人为活动打破了原有的平衡（好的动物少了，坏的有损害的就出来了），以致惹怒了神山。第四章讲到除狼害之外另一个更让村民担忧的大问题，即明永冰川的融化。明永冰川因位于德钦县明永村后山而得名，是卡瓦格博峰群中数条冰川中最长最大的冰川，也是中国冰舌前端海拔最低的冰川。然而近年来明永冰川不断后退，令明永村村民担忧并将冰川后缩的原因归结为1991年梅里山难死者的遗骸“玷污了神山”。同时村民认为近年来不断增加的游客数量导致吵闹喊叫，攀折花木，随意踩踏冰川也是致使冰川退缩的另一大原因。从众多从当地村民中收集的意见中可见村民认为外人的探险和开发活动打扰了神山，因此灾害是神山震怒发出的警告。这些认识进一步说明了，尽管村民在一定程度上掌握了一些现代科学知识，但神山信仰依然更有说服力。对此郭净提出我们应该尊重藏族村民在世代与荒野相处中总结出的人与自然的相处之道，“改变居高临下的态度，在传授科学的同时，也认真倾听当地人的声音”（第78页）。

或许很多人会质疑这种强调当地传统文化之重要性的目的是否是希望当地人固守信仰，永远保持一种‘纯朴’但是又停滞或‘落后’的状态。在《雪山之书》中郭净说“一个人应该有两个世界，一个世俗的，一个神圣的。能在这两个空间自由穿行，生活才有意义。藏族就是这样度过一生的”（第412页）。与其说郭净试图向读者呈现一个亘古神秘的德钦藏区，不如说他其实在引导读者更清晰的认识到藏民自古以来能够在世俗和神圣间穿行游走的能力，而这种能力正是他

们同自然相处之道的精髓。同时在本书的很多篇章中郭净也描写了古今中外被德钦藏区传统文化和卡瓦格博而吸引的来往之客。从19世纪50年代起来到德钦地区的西方传教士，探险家到当代的环保主义者，支教教师以及前来旅游观光的游客，郭净记录了同卡瓦格博相遇的‘外来人’以及他们的经历。郭净认为，对卡瓦格博来说，“我们不过是千百年来，到此窥探雪山秘密的人群中的一小部分”（第20页）。无论我们同雪山索求什么，“山在那里”（George Mallory名言）。在这里我认为，如果我们将人类同雪山／自然的关系定义为供求关系，那么一个难以避免的悖论就产生了：突显人类相比较雪山和自然的渺小，同时也是肯定在人与自然的辩证关系中人类的主动位置。人和雪山，到底谁是主体，谁是客体？遗憾的是郭净并未对相关理论比如“主体性”，“自我／他者”做更多的链接，也许如他自己所说，此书主意为扩展普通读者对卡瓦格博和藏民信仰的认识，并没有刻意过多理论化。因此我建议未来学者可以借郭净书中的阐述以及列举放在理论背景中进行深入研究。

在不同章节中，郭净试图从不同群体的眼光和位置描述他们与卡瓦格博的际遇并试图呈现一个多元的流动的群体。针对近年来迅速发展起来的旅游业，郭净在第九章中谈到旅游对卡瓦格博地区藏民生活带来的影响。虽然旅游发展对社区带来的消极影响引起近年来一些中国学者的关注（见杨子江，杨桂华，2009），但很少有人真正深入社区，考察旅游发展，藏民信仰以及环境之间的交叉关系。通过对不同群体以及不同‘旅行’方式的比较观察，郭净带我们进一步了解世俗与神圣之间的互动交融，当然也不乏碰撞。现代游客乘飞机来到德钦，常常以车代步，带着高端相机和齐全的户外设备进行“转山”，沿途住旅馆吃饭店，而当地人转经行囊简陋，全程徒步。更有德钦以外藏区来的朝圣者“阿觉娃”，他们是结队而行的异常虔诚的佛教徒或僧侣，基本没有装备，风餐露宿（第十七章）。郭净描述到：“他们只握着一件如登山竹杖那样简单的武器：佛法。他们走进荒原，不求征服周围的世界，只为了降服自己的心灵。由于他们降服了内心，所以他们不被任何力量征服”（第415页）。现代游客对卡瓦格博的认识普遍受限于旅行社对“梅里雪山”的神秘化和浪漫化，而将虔诚转山当作生活信仰的朝圣者则同外界“有情互动”（郁丹，2010）。除了藏族朝圣者，郭净也细心的记录了转经路上的俗人以及非藏族的朝圣经历，他们同样将卡瓦格博的特殊意义同个人的生命联系在一起。朝圣卡瓦格博的经历让我们认识到，这不仅是一种传统的宗教活动，

也是人与“圣境”沟通的基本形式。由此郭净解释道，转经卡瓦格博所显示的人与自然的关系很难用生态保护研究中盛行的“人类中心主义／自然中心主义”的框架来界定。郭净认为藏民的宇宙观属于张光直教授所说的东方式的“连续性”文明。不同于西方的“断裂性”文明，东方“连续性”文明延续了人在自然环境中与各种生命形式相互交融的文化观念，人与自然，自然与文化不是二元的，人同其他生命形式一样都由地，水，火，风，空五大元素组成。郭净建议我们将藏区类似卡瓦格博这样的神山圣水理解为“自然圣境”，泛指“对当地社区和居民有公认的具有精神和信仰文化含义的自然地域或水域”

(Wild et al. 2008, 第5页)。滇西北的藏族社区长期以来便有自给自足的一套自然资源管理系统，而这一管理系统是同他们的神山圣水的信仰以及相关仪式密不可分的。山林和草场是藏民赖以生存的资源，这一依赖也更加强化了藏民认为是人被神山所保护而非人去保护神山的想法。无论是烧香台，寺庙以及民居建筑这样的物质文化遗产，还是仪式，民间传说，以及歌舞（例如弦子）等其他形式的非物质文化遗产，都显示了藏民的神山信仰及日常生活之间的紧密联系（第十三，十四和十五章）。郭净认为在当下环境急速恶化人类面对环境危机的情况下将藏民的对“自然圣境”的尊重和信仰同环境保护活动理念有机结合，针对“自然圣境”的地域文化将西方的环保理念进行重新解读，或许可以避免盲目使用所谓科学方法而无视或忽略当地民族的知识传统。当此类建议在人文地理学界日渐流行的同时（如 Litzinger 2004, Hakkenberg 2008, Coggins & Hutchinson 2006 等），近来也有学者提出我们应该深入探讨宇宙观同本体论之间的区别，以免重蹈盲目简化的使用‘传统知识’到‘西式环保’的覆辙（Coggins & Gesang Zeren 2014）。

除了徐徐道来的文字叙述以外，《雪山之书》中还收录了大量多年来作者在旅途和田野中拍摄的照片，作者和当地村民自制的手绘地图以及插图。作为中国首批在民族志田野调查中使用电子摄像机的学者，郭净坦诚道摄像机是“现代人”的“电子眼”，看到的是同当地人不一样的“现实”。在充分将摄像机运用为道具及工具的同时，郭净尽量通过镜头呈现一个流动的画面，而不是凝固静止的。他试图描述拍摄的画面并非摄像者一人所为，正如整个研究的调查过程，是研究者／摄像者同参与者的共同作品。近年来德钦藏区及整个中国西部偏远地区普遍存在的发展与保护的矛盾就是在郭净的“电子眼”和当地“演员”互动中展开的问题和现象之一。到底在各种社会经济生

态文化快速变化时，我们应如何看待全球化对德钦藏区的冲击？拉帕波特（Rappaport 1979）认为，在非西方的生存系统普遍围绕礼拜仪式建立的情况下，宗教和仪式是保持当地生态稳定的主要因素。因为仪式是作为对自然和超自然力量的回应而被发明和举行的，仪式产生的实际效应使人类在生态系统平衡中找到自己的位置。因此我们应当重视古老仪式在现代政治经济中扮演的角色。然而 Netting（1993）却反对说，恰恰是在资本主义经济形成之前存在的社会机构和实践才是维持生态系统平衡的基础，而当代生态系统平衡被打破是更权威的社会机构（资本家机构）出现的结果。结合这些看似对立但相互呼应的观点，郭净也在德钦藏区观察到“有一些人在思考这样的问题：是要维护藏族人基本的生活和信仰，还是要把自己变成演员，为一点金钱去满足世俗的欲望？”（第 213 页）经济方式和生活方式的转型给当地村民带来顾虑和思考，未来的方向在哪里？对此作者更多的强调当地村民自主选择的重要性，但是“个人都会凭本性挑选其一，三天的享受还是世代的拥有”（第 213 页）。我个人认为太多复杂性和社会性在这“凭本性挑选”的含糊其辞中被忽略，另外村民的选择到底是主动还是被动？选项是否只是二取其一？是否有协调或重新定义的可能？郭净在《用牧人的眼睛看这世界》一文中记录了他随“山水自然保护中心”在青海省果洛州久治县白玉乡参加“乡村之眼”的培训经历。此次培训是当地民间团体“年保玉则生态环境保护协会”组织的纪录片摄制培训，僧人，牧民用发到手上的摄像机拍摄自己眼中的“社区影像”，并在培训，摄制和编制的过程中对相关话题展开讨论（郭净 2011）。郭净提议纪录片是为藏民积累经验和同外界交换经验的一个平台：“通过彼此经验的交流，人们才能超越自身的局限，更透彻地理解生活”（第 178 页）。

我有幸于 2013 年在滇西北的香格里拉县洛吉乡尼汝村进行田野调查时读了《雪山之书》。藏族社区的语言和风俗因地各异，因此尽管相隔不远，尼汝藏民同德钦藏民依然有些不同。虽然如此，我还是在《雪山之书》中看到很多尼汝村藏族社区的影子，比如神山信仰和民俗风情。特别是人与自然相融一体，“圣境”的氛围就像在清晨或雨后山间升起的雾气，有形或无形都始终缭绕在祖祖辈辈生活在这里的人们的日常起居中。在八九月份的雨季因天气无法农作的人们“在家坐起”，聚着火塘烤火，打酥油茶，或喝一小碗酥里玛，同邻里亲戚闲谈，女人们一边谈天一边捻制羊毛线。这时我会坐在做手工活的阿扎（同德钦阿佳，意为奶奶）身旁打开《雪山之书》读上几页。

阿扎偶尔抬起头，好奇的看着我手中厚厚的书，我便指一下封面说“卡瓦格博”，她则点一下头，嘟囔道“西达”（同德钦一样，意为土地的主人），继续她手上的活计。在尼汝村的经历另我在读《雪山之书》时更抱了自省自问的眼光，而作者开阔又细微的文字令人感到无时不刻的交流。我意识到书里书外作为研究者我们都要勤奋反省自己的位置和视角，那一双注视别人的眼睛也总是应该审视自己。据作者郭净介绍，《雪山之书》是他对自己常年来同德钦藏民社区的交流做的一次回顾和小节，并非企图做太过理论化的分析。但无论怎样，《雪山之书》中对德钦藏民围绕卡瓦格博和其他自然圣境的信仰，以及这种信仰在藏民们变化着的文化，社会，生活中扮演的角色，进行了详细的记录和认真的探索。类似这样的作品近年来不断涌现（如扎西尼玛和马建忠 2010 年合著的《雪山之眼》），相信在国际学术界对这一藏汉交界地带的社会文化环境变迁愈加关注的大环境下（Yeh & Coggins 2014），此类作品能更好的帮助更广大的人群去理解这一区域正在进行的转变。

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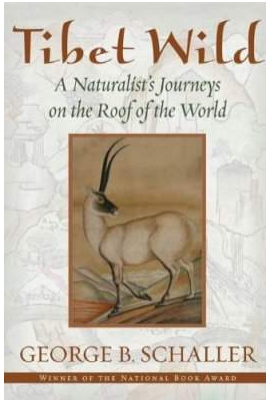
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George B. Schaller. 2012. *Tibet Wild: A Naturalist's Journeys on the Roof of the World*. Washington, D.C.; Island Press 372pp, 32 plates, 9 maps, 2 tables, selected references, index. ISBN 978-1-61091-172-6 (cloth: alk. paper 18.99USD)

*Es sieht ein Mondenschatten
Als mein Gefährte mit,
Und aus den weißen Matten
Such ich des Wildes Tritt.....*
Wilhelm Müller, *Gute Nacht*

George Schaller's remarkable career spans nearly six decades of work resulting in field studies of wildlife in the most remote regions, including pioneering investigations on four continents. More than half of that time was spent involved with studies of the wildlife of the Tibetan Plateau and neighboring regions. Following each new phase of his career, from his work on mountain gorillas in Rwanda, tigers in India, lions on the Serengeti, wild sheep in the Himalayas, and Tibetan antelope and other wildlife on the Tibetan steppes, he has made the time to publish a book on each of his expeditions – or more exactly, two (see full list in Appendix). One is always a scholarly monograph full of data, tables, and maps, the other a popular account

for the general public. These paired volumes are usually published within one year of each other, and there have been six such pairings so far. For example, Schaller's classic *the Mountain Monarchs: Wild Sheep and Goats of the Himalaya* was published in 1978; in 1980, he published *Stones of Silence: Journeys in the Himalaya*; in 1997 he published the popular *Tibet's Hidden Wilderness: Wildlife and Nomads of the Chang Tang Reserve*; and the next year, 1998, saw the appearance of his scholarly monograph *Wildlife of the Tibetan Steppe*.

By this accounting, this latest book, coming fifteen years after the last, seems an outlier – perhaps we can expect a scholarly monograph on Schaller's work in Tibet and Central Asia soon. And yet, this current book is scholarly enough, being filled with facts, figures, maps, and even data tables. Perhaps it is meant to pair with the highly personal *A Naturalist and Other Beasts*, a collection of essays that Schaller has written over the past fifty years. However, this new book has few references and is interspersed with anecdotes, bibliographic information, and quotes from Schaller's past popular books. The book is a very readable and highly entertaining hodgepodge, not only an introduction to the wildlife and conservation issues of the Tibetan Plateau and surrounding highlands, but also a rare glimpse into the life and motives of a man who can be counted among the great naturalist-explorers of central Asia, a descendant of a tradition of inquiry that began one and a half centuries ago with the likes of Pere Armand David (starting in 1864), the Russian-Cossack teams led by Nikolay Przhevalsky and his colleagues (with expeditions from 1871 to 1910) and of course Sven Hedin, whose expeditions spanned the years 1894 to 1935 and whom Schaller credits as his childhood inspiration.

Schaller opens his book with an introduction that turns introspective, almost melancholy, a tone that recurs often throughout the book. Never for long, however, "With each expedition, I slough off my past like a snake skin and live in a new moment" (7).

The narrative leaps right into the field, into the middle of a 1985 winter expedition to the Tibetan Plateau in Qinghai, recounting Schaller's first meeting with the Chiru, or Tibetan Antelope, the

remarkable antelope-like goat of the high steppes of the plateau. Through serendipity or bad luck, Schaller's expedition has stumbled into one of the worst snow disasters ever recorded for the region. While others scramble to provide fodder to starving livestock and deliver relief to stranded herder camps, Schaller measures wildlife carcasses and records wolf predation, struggling to complete a wildlife census under nearly impossible conditions.

It is at this point that Schaller makes his 'covenant' to complete a study of the Chiru. The first five chapters of the book detail his many expeditions to study this then poorly-known species and to trace the long annual migration of females to their traditional calving grounds. Schaller quotes at length from the accounts of past explorers of the colonial era, and also from the account of a modern expedition of mountaineers led by Rick Ridgeway, which finally succeeded in reaching the calving grounds Schaller had long sought.¹ Schaller also relates the story of his discovery that Chiru are slaughtered to supply the international market in *shahtoosh*, the ultra-fine underwool of the Chiru. This discovery, and Schaller's efforts to publicize it, started an international campaign, eventually successful, to stop the trade and the decimation of Chiru populations that it had caused.

Two chapters follow that cover other wildlife of the Tibetan Plateau. The first provides some badly needed defense of the much-maligned Plateau Pika, a small relative of the rabbit that is widely blamed by herders and agriculture department officials for pasture degradation.² Schaller provides interesting glimpses into this animal's biology, and argues that pikas are symptoms of pasture

¹ To set the record straight, the first scientific account of a Chiru calving ground was published in 1999 in an obscure Chinese journal, the result of an expedition led by Zhang Huibin from the Arjinshan Nature Reserve Management Bureau. See Li et al. (1999). Far from being a 'resident population', many of the 10,000 or more females there had migrated hundreds of kilometers to reach the remote site in the mid-Kunlun Mountains.

² For more on this, see Smith and Foggin, 1999 and Dpal ldan chos dbyings 2012.

degradation, not its cause. He cites evidence that pikas are, on balance, beneficial to pasture health, and even provides translations of three pika fables that he wrote for distribution to Tibetan children.

The following chapter recounts a west to east traverse of the almost uninhabited Chang Tang National Nature Reserve in the Tibet Autonomous Region and the San Jiang Yuan National Nature Reserves in Qinghai, with its scattered communities of herders. Here, Schaller considers the complexity of achieving conservation goals in a landscape already occupied by traditional Tibetan herders grappling with the collapse of traditional relationships with the land under the weight of government policy imperatives from above, and with the collapse of the turf beneath their feet in the face of completely novel weather resulting from global climate change.

The book then leaves the Tibetan Plateau for a kind of intermission, an inner exploration of the author's beginnings as a naturalist and as a lover of 'the huge emptiness' of the Tibetan Plateau. His difficult childhood explains much about his ability to spend months and even years 'alone' in a foreign culture. Coming of age in the 1940s at a time of social upheaval and then war in Germany, in 1947 he immigrated to a new country, the USA, which only reluctantly accepted the 'enemy alien'. His blossoming as a keen observer of nature and his first immersion in wilderness on a failed prospecting expedition in Alaska, where he later became an undergraduate student, offer fascinating glimpses into the making of an explorer and a great zoologist. He also describes his first meeting with his devoted wife, Kay, a remarkable explorer in her own right. His career in wildlife biology is well documented in his many previous popular books, but the summary here is interleaved with new anecdotes and insights, such as Schaller's decision to select new projects on new species in new areas that had so far been neglected "to give voice to animals which have had no one to speak on their behalf" (192). Other decisions are explained by serendipity, including his first encounter with China. "Chance and fate brought me to China and time has now sealed the pact to continue our collaboration on behalf of the country's natural heritage" (198-199).

I have pondered in print elsewhere (Bleisch 2013) about what motivated the great explorer-naturalists of the last two centuries to seek out the most remote and inhospitable parts of China and its neighbors. George Orwell's classification of the varied motives of writers fits quite well: 1) sheer egoism, 2) aesthetic enthusiasm, 3) historical impulse, and 4) political purpose. Many explorers show more of one of these motivations than the others – the roots of Sven Hedin's grand-standing in the courts of Europe, of Frank Kingdon-Ward's ecstatic descriptions of flowers and forests, of Joseph Rock's pedantic catalogs of plants, routes, and Naxi texts, and of George Fortune's industrial espionage in the service of empire – these are all easily categorized.

Schaller is perhaps the last in this distinguished lineage of Western explorer-naturalists. What then explains his determination and passion for work in some of the most difficult areas on earth? As this often very personal book makes clear, Schaller makes no secret of his political purpose – to achieve lasting conservation of the rare wildlife species that he studies. The natural history imperative – to decipher and explain the often arcane details of the ranging, diet, and ecology of his study subjects – has certainly been a constant in Schaller's career; no less in this book, which, despite the fact that it is clearly intended for a popular American audience (note the use of feet and pounds), is still full of facts and exact figures, and even the occasional table. His aesthetic enthusiasm courses through the entire book, like a brisk wind blowing across the treeless plateau. He lists his achievements, but with more humility than pride, and Schaller surprisingly gives more than the usual credit to a long list of colleagues, collaborators, and others who have worked on the Tibetan Plateau.

Whatever motivates the man, his work speaks for itself – meticulous and full of hard-earned information, often from rare first-hand observations of species difficult to find and rarely seen. In addition to a lengthy record of scientific publications, Schaller has also always stood up as a powerful voice for protection of his study animals, advocating active protection in the wild, and blasting the

hypocrisy of those who seek to make money from rare animals while couching their efforts in the rhetoric of conservation or 'sustainable' use. This has not always made him welcome in the halls of the government offices, but his 'patient persistence' has paid off again and again in gaining access – often first access – to study animals that few others have been able to approach. His pioneering work has repeatedly contributed to the establishment of protected areas and active protection for species threatened with imminent extinction.

After this all too brief, introspective interlude, the book then picks up roughly where it left off, in 1995, with the first of Schaller's expeditions into the valley of the Yalung Tsangpo. Two chapters cover the expeditions into the *beyul* 'hidden land' of Pemako, the sanctuary of the Namche Barwa region, including the Yalong Tsangpo gorge, the deepest on earth. The spiritual stirrings that Schaller feels here contrast sharply with the vivid descriptions of wildlife at risk and of the scrimmage of explorers, both foreign and Chinese (but not including Schaller himself), trying to claim firsts in what amounts to a siege of the gorge. The two chapters, nine and ten, end on a hopeful note, with the establishment of the Yarlung Tsangpo Great Canyon National Nature Reserve "one of the most important protected areas in Asia" (255). Not so optimistic is the ending of the chapter recounting the efforts of Schaller and others to establish an international peace park among the four countries that cover the Pamirs, with their still viable population of Marco Polo Sheep and other wildlife.

The last two chapters of the book return to the Tibetan Plateau to give accounts of Schaller's work on the Tibetan Brown Bear and, finally, the Snow Leopard in Qinghai's Yushu Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture. Schaller's enthusiasm for these animals is contagious as he recounts rare encounters with these most elusive predators. He also describes the dedication and work of conservationist monks:

...the messages of their scriptures translated into actual conservation efforts. The enthusiasm of some monks for protecting the natural world uplifted my spirit (353).

In the final pages, Schaller expresses optimism for the future of wildlife in Tibet.

An environmental conscience is here beginning to permeate individuals throughout society. The snow leopard and all other species which shares its realm will, I feel assured, survive if we grant them tolerance, respect and compassion. Like an invisible deity, the snow leopard can help to assure a healthy and harmonious mountain environment, if only we will treasure its existence (353-354).

He describes his vision for coming generations, that the entire landscape could be managed "for the benefit of all living beings" (353). This is far cry from a vision of nature reserves as uninhabited (or depopulated) wilderness fortresses protected by armed guards.

Is Schaller being sincere, or is this just an example of skillful means in the service of his conservation goals? In the past, Schaller has often shown scant sympathy for humans whom fate has left living alongside his study animals – animals that have often been predators capable of directly reducing a herder's income through their depredations on domestic livestock. Even considering his efforts for conservation of more gentle animals, such as gorillas, pandas, and Tibetan antelope, Schaller's passion for traditional protected areas has often meant the deprivation of local people of their rights to use land, sometimes lands that their ancestors traditionally used for generations before establishment of protection. In this book, however, Schaller expresses a much more sympathetic awareness of the plight of local communities. In the final chapter, he even comes close, through quotation of Toni Huber's writings, to advocating community-based conservation as a more effective alternative to traditional top-down protected area establishment. Schaller seems to have embraced a new approach to conservation – particularly in Tibetan areas – that includes empowering monks and monasteries to protect wildlife and sacred sites.

All too often, studies of threatened species by biologists end with recommendations for conservation that amount to little more than calls for more research. Schaller has admirably never fallen into this trap. He has consistently made practical recommendations for conservation action. Putting these recommendations down on paper, however, and working for their actual implementation are two different things. Conservation experts have all too readily walked away from projects with disparaging comments about government authorities who fail to implement carefully crafted plans. However, a successful advisor is one who is not only correct, but who also has the skill and patience to convince the powers-that-be to make recommendations become a reality. It is a difficult and frustrating endeavor. Schaller deserves great credit for taking time from his beloved fieldwork to see his recommendations, sometimes, but not always, become reality. The conservation actions and species recoveries that have resulted are fitting legacy to a most remarkable career.

Above all this, as Schaller himself notes when relating a dark moment of doubt, is the legacy of younger conservationists that Schaller has influenced and inspired.

Lying in the cocoon of my sleeping bag during the long hours of night waiting for dawn, my thoughts distill life past and present... In the darkness of my soul, I... look for something upon which my heart can rest, some accomplishment of lasting value, something beyond myself... I believe that my greatest gift to a country is to leave behind trained nationals who will continue the fight to protect nature's beauty. In this way my legacy of knowledge and spirit will flow onward long after I have ceased to be even a memory (99).

Schaller's legacy on the Tibetan Plateau and in Central Asia will long be remembered.

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APPENDIX: BOOKS BY GEORGE B. SCHALLER

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